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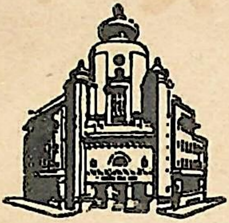

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IN THE VISION OF GOD

PART I

Swami Ramdas

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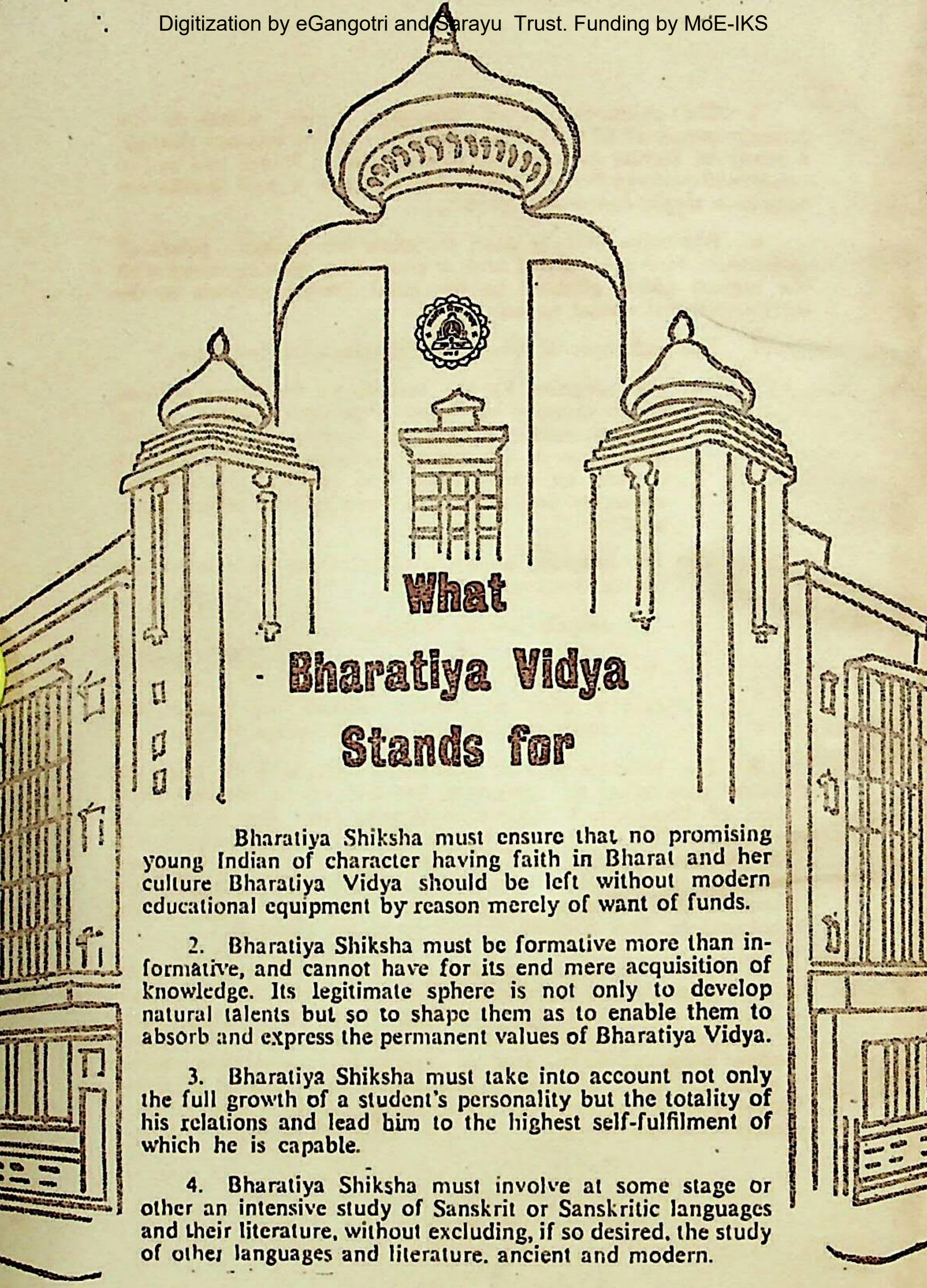

What Bharatiya Vidya Stands for

Bharatiya Shiksha must ensure that no promising young Indian of character having faith in Bharat and her culture Bharatiya Vidya should be left without modern educational equipment by reason merely of want of funds.

2. Bharatiya Shiksha must be formative more than informative, and cannot have for its end mere acquisition of knowledge. Its legitimate sphere is not only to develop natural talents but so to shape them as to enable them to absorb and express the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya.

3. Bharatiya Shiksha must take into account not only the full growth of a student's personality but the totality of his relations and lead him to the highest self-fulfilment of which he is capable.

4. Bharatiya Shiksha must involve at some stage or other an intensive study of Sanskrit or Sanskritic languages and their literature, without excluding, if so desired, the study of other languages and literature, ancient and modern.

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5. The re-integration of Bharatiya Vidya, which is the primary object of Bharatiya Shiksha, can only be attained through a study of forces, movements, motives, ideas, forms and art of creative life-energy through which it has expressed itself in different ages as a single continuous process.

6. Bharatiya Shiksha must stimulate the student's power of expression, both written and oral, at every stage in accordance with the highest ideals attained by the great literary masters in the intellectual and moral spheres.

7. The technique of Bharatiya Shiksha must involve—

(a) the adoption by the teacher of the *Guru* attitude which consists in taking a personal interest in the student; inspiring and encouraging him to achieve distinction in his studies; entering into his life with a view to form ideals and remove psychological obstacles; and creating in him a spirit of consecration; and

(b) the adoption by the student of the *Shishya* attitude by the development of—

- (i) respect for the teacher,
- (ii) a spirit of inquiry,
- (iii) a spirit of service towards the teacher, the institution, Bharat and Bharatiya Vidya.

8. The ultimate aim of Bharatiya Shiksha is to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Mahavira have expressed themselves in modern times in the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

9. Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with every kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student, not to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form or attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present it to the world

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, 1-89-i

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IN THE VISION OF GOD

Part I

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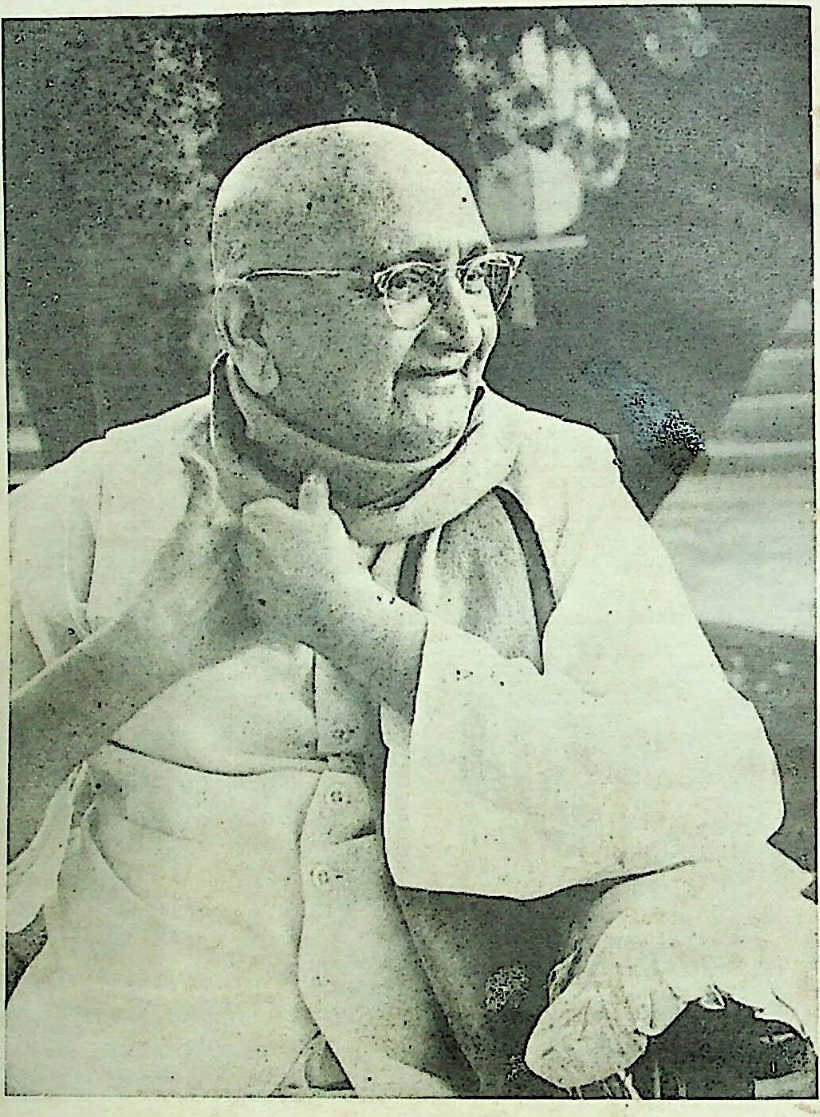

Swami Ramdas

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IN THE VISION OF GOD

Part I

By
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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulsions of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2.50.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata,* summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata:* "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita,* which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,
NEW DELHI
3rd October 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

I feel it is a great honour and rare privilege that Mahatma Ramdas has asked me to write a brief introductory note to his experience collected in his "In the Vision of God." I came to know Ramdas through his "In Quest of God" but it was nearly a year after I read the book that I was privileged to meet him, and ever since (October 1926) it has given me the greatest happiness to spend as long a time in his company as his numerous travels (some of which are chronicled in the present book) and my worldly duties would allow. Every time I have been with him, I have felt that each day spent in his blessed company was intrinsically worth far more to me than many months that I spent at Cambridge. Books can give us learning, contact with distinguished professors can give us enthusiastic interest in scientific research but neither will give us the secret of that ever charming and blissful smile, redolent of childlike surrender to the Will of the Lord, which beams out of the face of Mahatma Ramdas.

Readers of his "In Quest of God" will see how in the earlier days Sri Krishna's assurance (in the Gita IX 22):

> "To those men who worship Me alone thinking of no other, to those ever harmonious, I bring all security."

was verified even in the little details of his everyday life. In the present book also many such instances will be easily recognised. I would in particular draw the attention of the reader to the vivid way in which Ramcharandas came to believe in the mighty potency of that great Sloka of the Gita. The life and teaching of Ramdas is however dominated equally by the other great Sloka of the Gita XVIII 66:

> "Abandoning all duties (Dharma) come unto Me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins,"

and also of the Upanishad Mahavakya:

> "Verily, All this is Brahman."

Whenever it happens that a person comes to Swami Ramdas with the idea of showing his own superior mental equipment got from the study of books, it is amusing to hear Ramdas say: "O! Ram, this Das knows nothing but what you have chosen to teach him. In your Lila you have now come to him pretending to be ignorant as if to test Ramdas whether he has learnt the lesson rightly." I am of course not quoting the exact words but the spirit of the way in which the superior person come to question Ramdas would be met. When, however, a person comes to him with humility in his heart, anxious to learn, he will get luminous ideas of the way which will lead to the feet of the Lord.

May the spirit of the Lord be infused into more and more persons by their contact with Ramdas is the earnest prayer of his humble admirer.

S. R. U. SAVOOR

This book is now being
published in two parts.

ANANDASHRAM

Anandashram,
20th September, 1963

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PREAMBLE

By the command of the almighty Lord, Ramdas, His child, undertakes the task of continuing the story of his experiences from the time and place where he broke off at the end of his first book "In Quest of God." The narrative of "In Quest of God" extends over to one year's life after the great change came upon him. The purpose of the present book is to draw further the thread of the same narrative, and it contains an account of his later experiences in the course of nine years that have elapsed. Before proceeding with the story it would be necessary for him to place before the reader a brief summary—mainly concerning his spiritual struggle and evolution during the first year—so that it might bring out in a proper perspective the later experiences chronicled in this book.

It was in the year 1921, in Mangalore, that the all-merciful Lord of the universe first fired Ramdas' bosom with a keen longing to realise Him. From that time his life was undergoing a marvellous change. His one overwhelming passion and aim of life was to live for God and God alone. God's powerful Name was indelibly stamped on his tongue. Now it was that he was becoming conscious of a divine influence working silently but irresistibly in him gradually dominating and possessing him. He felt an awakening within the very core of his being. With steady steps and unflagging zeal he now entered upon a path of rigorous self-discipline. The trials and hardships of the path did not daunt him. Repeated appeals, persuasions and remonstrances could not make him swerve an inch from this path. He was calm, earnest and determined. As time passed in prayer, fasting and repetition of God's Name, the consciousness of divine possession and guidance assumed such a predominance that at last the divine voice within him drove him forth from Mangalore into the wide world.

What was his condition at this momentous hour? He was a dazed and helpless creature caught in the grip of an all-powerful being. He did not know what he was doing. He was under the full control of an almighty Power without any offer of resistance on his part—just as a baby in the hands of its mother. Verily, it was God alone who held him—a God who is at once his divine mother and master, so real, loving, kind and good. Blessed indeed is the day when God made Ramdas entirely His own. O mother and master divine, all glory to Thee! How tenderly He nursed and guided His new-born offspring during his first year's itinerant life all over India forms the theme of "In Quest of God."

During that period what were his mental state, manner of life and outlook upon the world? His mind was merged in a unique stillness of peace; his life was one of unreserved self-surrender; and, as regards the world, in a sense it was not there for him, that is, he was dead as it were to the world. He was travelling from place to place like an automaton as if in a dream, indifferent to—nay, unconscious of—his body and environments. All through it, God to whom he had surrendered up his life was mysteriously influencing his movements and controlling and taking care of him in every way. It was really an entire dedication on one side and a watchful, benevolent protection on the other.

He experienced that he was living and moving in a new world in which he felt that there was none other than himself and his great master—Ram—his all in all. In this wonderful vision of inexpressible ecstasy and peace he struggled to dwell always. This exalted consciousness, possessing as it did the characteristic of perfect vacancy or emptiness, was filled with an ineffable rapture of peace, silence and repose. The dual throng, pleasure and pain, good and evil, cold and heat, etc., relating to the physical body affected him not, for his mind was not there to take note of these sensations; it would always be in tune with the infinite spirit of stillness and peace. There were occasions when under certain conditions he would be dragged down with a jerk as it were to the sense of the old world and its associations, but he would be instantly pulled up by that silent and watchful spirit within.

In those days Ramdas' haunts were caves, jungles, ruins, riversides, grave-yards, hills and cremation grounds. It appeared that these places exerted on him a strange fascination. Instinctively he avoided the din and bustle of the city life and was unconsciously led away from it to dreadful solitudes. The sense of fear had vanished from him entirely—danger and death had lost their terrors for him. A feeling of perfect assurance, security and protection was ever with him. The powerful Ram-mantram never left his lips. He was uttering it like a machine. It has been revealed in "In Quest of God" how miraculously he was more than once saved from terrible situations. It seemed as if God had taken him up for His experiments—to mould, transform and manipulate him as He willed—a wax lump in His dexterous hands.

Some friends of Northern India who had met him during his first year's wandering life declared that they observed him as having been possessed by extreme dispassion. He was indifferent alike to his body and to the external world and was found absorbed solely in Ram-smaran or God-remembrance. He was also discovered to be like a child, passive, docile and obedient. He was bathed, clothed and fed and led in all things. In fact he had neither attraction nor repulsion for the world. His attitude towards it was simply inexpressible, for he felt, in fact, nothing to interest him in the world, and curiosity he had none. It was simply a wonderful state. Even intellect and emotion seemed to have ceased to function. Truly, God by His power had eradicated from his heart the false, self-asserting ego, and was working Himself in its place—the one great power who causes both the internal and external movements in this world of phenomena.

At this period Ramdas scarcely talked. He was perfectly fearless. Love and hate, like and dislike, conveyed no meaning for him. In brief, he could be likened to a dry leaf tossed at random as the wind of divine will listed. It was thus that he was guided back by God to Mangalore after a year's absence.

CHAPTER I

PANCH PANDAV CAVE

(i) Unity of Religions

Panch Pandav cave is on the Kadri hill at a distance of two miles from Mangalore town. Of the six caves on this hill the one occupied by Ramdas was the largest. It is so situated that at dawn the sun's rays pierced straight through the darkness inside the cave, flooding it with their golden effulgence. He remained in the cave for nearly three months. He was then clad in a coarse khaddar cloth, and used for asan and bed a bare deerskin. A tiny earthen dish with cotton wick and cocoanut oil served the purpose of a lamp. Added to these, a copper water-pot comprised his equipment in that solitary retreat. His diet consisted of milk and plantains twice a day.

During the day he had a stream of visitors from the town and other parts of the district. They would take unfeigned delight in listening to the story of his travels and experiences in the course of a year's absence. The visitors were drawn from all castes and creeds. Hindus, Christians and Muhammadans, all alike, vied with each other in granting him the joy of their company. Itinerant sadhus and sannyasins would also bless him with their visits.

He discoursed with the Hindus upon the one supreme Brahman as the sole cause of creation, preservation and destruction. This great Reality has incarnated in India and other parts of the world in different ages to subdue evil and establish the rule of love and righteousness. Rama, Krishna, Buddha, the great rishis, mahatmas and saints point to the one goal as the highest aim of life, viz., liberation and union with God. Human life is solely intended for attaining this blessed state. The supreme Lord is seated in the heart of all beings and creatures. He is absolute existence, consciousness and bliss—Satchidananda. You can realize Him through one-pointed devotion and complete self-surrender. The initial step on the path to this goal is purity and control of mind which is acquired through concentration. An easy method for concentration is constant repetition of the divine Name and performance of all actions as a sacrifice to the Lord. You may call God by any name—Rama, Krishna, Shiva or any other you hold dear. The Name Himself is Brahman. The reiteration of the Name coupled with the meditation on the attributes of God purifies the mind. Prayers, hymns and fasting are necessary aids. You must develop the divine qualities of compassion, peace and forgiveness. God reveals Himself in that heart in which these ennobling virtues reside. Now the divine light shining within you dissolves the ego-sense, and your identity with the Godhead is realised. This experience grants you the knowledge of immortality. Thereafter, you dwell in a divine consciousness and your vision becomes universalised, bringing you supreme peace and ecstasy. Now it is that you behold the whole universe as the very expression of God whom you have discovered within you. Now God is everywhere for you—in everybody and everything. This transcendent vision unlocks the infinite fountain of love in your heart—a love that fills and embraces the entire cosmos. All distinctions now disappear in the equality of this vision. This supreme state of beatitude bestows on you liberation and immortal joy. Believe that incarnations or divine teachers like Jesus Christ, Muhammad, Zoroaster and others are also manifestations of the same great Truth. Verily, all the different religions are so many paths that lead mankind to the one universal God.

To the Muhammadans Ramdas would speak of Allah and

Muhammad. Allah means the almighty. Islam signifies the way to peace. God is indeed all power and peace. Prophet Muhammad established Islam among the warring and ignorant tribes of Arabia so as to awaken in them the spirit of peace, love and brotherhood. He taught the way to reach Allah—the almighty. How to obtain Him? He says, "Surrender your will to Allah's will. Have full faith in His omnipotence and understand that everything happens by His will." Self-surrender is the path pointed out by Muhammad. He emphasised that surrender comes only through perfect self-control by prayer and fasting. He enjoins upon his followers to say namaz or prayers at least five times a day. This communion would keep them in continued recollection of God, forming a strong basis for a life of purity and peace. Conditions for this attainment are: practice of love, compassion and kindness to all fellow-beings. He held that they should exercise toleration towards other faiths which also take the aspiring souls towards God. His dictum is really this: there should be no compulsion in religion. He laid specific stress upon charity, sincerity, honesty and fellow-feeling. He preached that unity born of self-sacrifice and mutual love makes you recognize the oneness and omnipotence of God. To realize unity amongst mankind is to dwell in the one God—in the mansion of eternal power and peace, and to earn everlasting life.

To the Christians Ramdas would say: To have faith in Christ means to accept him as your ideal. Your sole aim should be to attain the Christ-ideal and to live up to his pure and selfless life. Let the thought of Christ-ideal possess your very soul and inspire your life and its activities. Christ is an embodiment of divine love. He defines God as love, and this truth he has come to prove in his life. What is the nature of the love he enunciates? It is a mingled perfume of meekness, purity and mercy. Blessed is he who is filled with the fragrance of love, because he will then be a true and accepted child of God—love of God has become manifest in him. He exhorts: Love one another and God dwelleth in you. It is this supreme love that converts you into the image of God. This supreme love enables you to enter into the kingdom of eternal happiness. The kingdom of heaven is nothing but a blissful consciousness which is born of everlasting life. He reveals the secret of this kingdom when he says: "The kingdom of heaven is within you." The Father and the Son are one. Identification with the Son is identification with the Father. Father is eternal peace manifest as the Son—the infinite love. So your life should be ruled by Christ, that is love. Then he leads you to the realm of the Father, the absolute peace. Do not think that Christ is the only way to salvation. Great souls have been, long before Christ, holding aloft the torch of divine knowledge for the illumination of the world. Christ held humility as the highest virtue; love and sympathy for all alike as the criterion of conduct; and resignation to the will of God as the means for the attainment of the kingdom of heaven or everlasting life and peace.

Ramdas does not belong to any particular creed. He firmly believes that all creeds, faiths and religions are different paths which ultimately converge to the same goal. The very sight of a Muhammadan reminds him of Muhammad; of a Christian, Jesus Christ; of a Hindu, Rama, Krishna or Shiva; and of a Buddhist, Buddha; of a Parsee, Zoroaster. All the great teachers of the world are from one God—the first eternal cause of all existence. Whether it be in the Gita or the Bible or the Koran or the Zend Avesta, we find the same note insistently ringing, viz., self-surrender is the supreme way to liberation or salvation.

(ii) Service of God

Reverting to the mode of life Ramdas was leading in the cave, he would rise at about three o'clock early morning and run down directly to the water tanks for bath. Though the path to the tanks was rough and risky, he would not forego his morning dip even in the darkest night. After bath he would sit in asan for meditation till day-break. For some days his meditation consisted of only the mental repetition of Ram-mantram. Then the mantram having stopped automatically, he beheld a small circular light before his mental vision. This yielded him thrills of delight. This experience having continued for some days, he felt a dazzling light like lightning, flashing before his eyes, which ultimately permeated and absorbed him. Now an inexpressible transport of bliss filled every pore of his physical frame. When this state was coming on, he would at the outset become oblivious of his hands and feet and then gradually his entire body. Lost in this trance-state he would sit for two to three hours. Still a subtle awareness of external objects was maintained in this state.

Some friends would pay him visits early in the morning when he was absorbed in the trance, and he had at the time a hazy recognition of their presence. He could hear sounds of talk, if any,—mere sounds without sense or meaning for him. Whenever he fell into the trance he would feel its grip so firmly that he could not easily shake it off. At the longest it would not last more than three hours. After returning to body-consciousness he would be engaged in singing to himself some hymns glorifying God and also in the loud recitation of the mantram. In fact, except when conversing, reading or writing he used to utter the mantram ceaselessly throughout the day.

The trance experience brought about another change, viz., sleep thereafter became a state of half-wakefulness or awareness during which he was filled with pure ecstasy. Sometimes, at dead of night, a friend would pay him a surprise visit. Although

Ramdas was in the trance-state, he could know the friend's approach even when he was yet a furlong from the cave. It was during this time that Ramdas, as willed by the Lord, devoted two hours past midnight to the work of writing the book "In Quest of God." The last days in the cave also saw the trance condition encroaching upon the hours of the day while no visitors were present. The utterance of the mantram would stop of itself and he would transcend the body-consciousness. Here a unique experience is worthy of note. One morning he was standing inside the cave gazing on the golden orb of the rising sun, and he felt the trance stealing over him and very soon he was entirely absorbed in it. Some time passed and he came back to the body-idea. A casual downward glance disclosed to his view a serpent coiled round his right leg. Its forked tongue was briskly licking his big toe. Ramdas was not affected by the sight. In the same motionless posture he watched the loving attention of the serpent. A minute or two thus passed and the reptile slowly unwound itself and crept out of the cave. He recollects to have addressed it thus: "O beloved Ram, why art thou in such a hurry to go?" The Lord's lila is really wonderful. All forms are His and He plays in various ways. The serpent friend conceived such a great love for Ramdas that it would come to see him every morning consecutively for three days after which it stopped away for good.

In accordance with a distinct command from the Lord within, he observed a vow of silence for seven days. Despite the pressure of friends he could not break it before the fixed time. For, he felt he was quite helpless in the matter. Surely. God had complete mastery over His servant.

Ramdas had noted a batch of lepers underneath the banyan trees in the Mangalore maidan. One of the lepers, whose disease was in an advanced state, was conveyed every day in a hand-cart by a small stout lad for alms from door to door. The face of this leper was so much disfigured by the fell disease that his features were quite indistinguishable. His whole face was one big sore—red and dripping with pus. His eyelids, nose and lips had all been eaten by the disease.

As commissioned by the Lord, Ramdas undertook to feed these leapers at noon. The kind visitors to the cave condescended to offer food for them. On collecting food from three houses a day, he would go to the maidan reaching at about one o'clock in the afternoon and feed them. The leper who had the worst attack came in for service first. His toes and fingers also having fallen a prey to leprosy, he could with great difficulty raise the food to his mouth.

While he was engaged in eating, Ramdas would be busy in driving away the flies that were settling on his face which at other times he covered with a piece of cloth. Ramdas had also to rub off gently the stream of pus coursing down his cheeks into his mouth. The remaining food would then be distributed to the boy and other lepers. The Lord put him to this service for about two months. All the time, far from feeling any weariness or repugnance, he performed the task in a spirit of enthusiasm surcharged with an objectless ecstasy. A few days before he bid adieu to the cave, the feeding work was suddenly stopped by the command of the Lord. O Lord, Thou feedest all Thy creatures in Thy own inscrutable ways, Ramdas is but an instrument in Thy omnipotent hands.

Soon after the feeding of the lepers had ended, a Malayali, that is, a native of Malabar, came to stay with Ramdas in the cave for a few days. He was so emaciated that he was only skin and bones. Ramdas thanked God for His having given him another opportunity to serve Him in the form of this skeleton-bodied Malayali. Ramdas scarcely found this friend in a talkative mood. The only expression that was now and again issuing from his lips in a weak voice was "Krishna, sharan, sharan." Ramdas would both at noon and in the evening run down to the city and by begging collect food to feed this welcome guest. O Lord, Thy manifestations are most marvellous. The lepers and the Malayali that he served are Thyself in those forms. The entire universe is Thy Self-revelation in which Thou art manifest in a variety of masks. Thou art the one absolute Truth, birthless and deathless; pure Satchidananda, eternal existence, knowledge and bliss.

Amongst the daily visitors mention has also to be made of a goat and a cow. Both would appear at the cave regularly for their share of plantains. The goat played with Ramdas with great familiarity. He would dance on his seat and sometimes climb on his shoulders. The cow on the other hand would quietly come to the entrance and with outstretched neck receive a plantain and then walk away.

(iii) Young Aspirants

The kind mother—Ramdas' wife in his old life—was laid up with fever for some days owing to the strain of the journey by steamboat while accompanying him from Hubli to Mangalore. He was visiting her once in every two or three days until she recovered. During one of the visits, the reputed saint of Puttur—Krishnarao—was in the house. He came to where Ramdas sat beside the ailing mother. At the sight of him, Ramdas prostrated at his feet. He sat down.

"Was it necessary that you should have entirely renounced the householder's life and taken up the diksha of sannyas?" he asked.

"Ram willed it so. Ramdas could not help it," Ramdas replied.

"Your Ram must then be wonderful. May I know where He is?" he questioned.

"He is residing in the hearts of us all, because He is all-pervading," Ramdas rejoined.

"I cannot see Him. How can we know that it is His will that guides us?" he asked again.

"He is invisible to the ordinary eye, but can be seen through a purified vision," Ramdas said. "Only when you see Him, you realize that it is His will that directs your actions. Freedom from attachment and complete surrender to Him are the conditions of this supreme vision."

"I cannot fully understand what you say," Krishnarao persisted. "I believe that worldly life need not be abandoned in order to realize God."

"True," Ramdas replied. "Ramdas still belongs to the world, not in a partial sense but in totality. His Beloved is not only in particular persons but is discovered to be residing, in all His power and glory, in all beings, creatures and things."

Here the conversation ended, and Ramdas left the house and returned to the cave.

One day at about five o'clock in the evening, a Saraswat lad of 14 years of age, who was an occasional visitor to the cave, dropped in. He was in tears. With an outburst of anguish he exclaimed:

"Rama, I will in future always dwell with you. I am not going to give you up. I desire to dedicate my life to Ram-nam."

"Ram," Ramdas advised him, "you cannot remain here. Your parents will be anxious about you. Go back to them."

"I have nothing to do with parents, house and the world. You are my all in all," the lad said. "I will go on repeating the holy Name in your society."

"You can do the same in your house," Ramdas suggested.

"It is not necessary that you should stop with him for uttering the Name."

"No," he said, "I cannot take the Name in our house. I am forced to go to school for which I have conceived a disgust."

"Where is the harm in attending school?" Ramdas asked.

"Oh! I have had enough of it. I fell into the society of certain boys who always indulged in unchaste talks, and my mind got terribly distracted. I will never again step into a school."

"In that case," Ramdas replied, "you may not attend school but remain pure by practising devotion at home. You are too young to take the proposed step without consulting your parents. Be guided by them. They mean always well. Only do not give up taking the holy Name. Trust Him whose Name you are uttering. Avoid the company of boys who defile your mind."

"Don't ask me to go back. My father, mother, teacher and all are yourself." Saying thus the boy entered the interior of the cave and, taking his position in a dark nook, went on with Ram-japa. Ramdas going up to him told him again to return to the city as it was growing dark. For some time he stood firm and would not yield, but at last agreed to go back to his parents. The night having come on, it was now quite dark. So Ramdas offered to escort him to his house which lay in the precincts of a temple in the city.

While descending the hill with the lad Ramdas met a friend with a lantern coming to invite him for a kirtan party in the house of his master. Ramdas handing the boy to his charge asked the friend to take him to his house. Ramdas proceeded to attend the kirtan party.

A few days later, another young man, a Kanarese Brahmin just out of his teens, walked in at dusk and proposed to throw in his lot with Ramdas. Here again the school life had driven him from home, relations and friends. This young man was thoroughly stubborn and refused to return to his friends in spite of Ramdas' utmost efforts. He remained for the night. He would disappear for the day, wandering aimlessly on the extensive tract of the Kadri hill and regain the cave in the night. He did not care for food. Ramdas would share with him what little food he was getting which consisted of but a small quantity of milk and a few plantains. For about a week the young man continued to live a life of an apathetic recluse. For the last night of his stay he stopped away, but turned up early the following morning, his clothes soiled with the brown stains of the earth. He said that he spent the night in the open on the hill, lying down on bare ground.

At noon a party of four men arrived at the cave. These were the young man's friends. His parents lived in a village, and he was in Mangalore for his studies. His friends asked him to go with them but he refused point-blank to do so. Then they appealed to Ramdas to advise him. Ramdas assured them that he had used all his powers of persuasion to induce him to return to his house but he had failed. However, he called the young man by his side and resting his hand on his shoulders said: "Ram, don't cause any further sorrow and pain to your parents. Do please go back." Strange as it would appear, the young man now obeyed and left with the friends who had come in search of him.

(iv) The True Vision: Samadarshan

For two years from the time of the significant change which had come over him, Ramdas had been prepared to enter into the very depths of his being for the realization of the immutable, calm and eternal spirit of God. Here he had to transcend name, form, thought and will—every feeling of the heart and faculty of the mind. The world had then appeared to him as a dim shadow—a dreamy nothing. The vision then was mainly internal. It was only for the glory of the Atman in His pristine purity, peace and joy as an all-pervading, immanent, static, immortal and glowing spirit.

In the earlier stages this vision was occasionally lost, pulling him down to the old life of diversity with its turmoil of like and dislike, joy and grief. But he would be drawn in again into the silence and calmness of the spirit. A stage was soon reached when this dwelling in the spirit became a permanent and unvarying experience with no more falling off from it, and then a still exalted state came on; his hitherto inner vision projected outward. First a glimpse of this new vision dazzled him off and on. This was the working of divine love. He would feel as though his very soul had expanded like the blossoming of a flower and, by a flash as it were, enveloped the whole universe embracing all in a subtle halo of love and light. This experience granted him a bliss infinitely greater than he had in the previous state. Now it was that Ramdas began to cry out "Ram is all, it is He as everybody and everything." This condition was for some months coming on and vanishing. When it wore away, he would instinctively run to solitude. When it was present, he freely mixed in the world preaching the glory of divine love and bliss. With this externalised vision started Ramdas' mission. Its fullness and magnificence was revealed to him during his stay in the Kadri cave, and here the experience became more sustained and continuous. The vision of God shone in his eyes and he would see none but Him in all objects. Now wave after wave of joy rose in him. He realized that he had attained to a consciousness, full of splendour, power and bliss.

Ramdas gave up the cave and set forth once again on a wandering life. He gave a touch of the inexpressible bliss he was enjoying to all who came in contact with him. Vast crowds thronged around him wherever he went. Divine love thrilled his entire being at the sight of big multitudes. In a state of perfect ecstasy he delivered himself out in accents of love and joy.

CHAPTER II

KOLLUR AND KASARAGOD

(i) Real Contentment

H. Umanathrao, a pure and selfless soul, with his devoted wife came down from Kundapur, a small town to the north of South Kanara, to take Ramdas over to his place. Ramdas left Kadri cave. The object of Umanathrao was to get him the darshan of a venerable saint staying at the famous temple of Mukambika of Kollur. The same evening they reached Kundapur. They travelled by motor-bus. The kind friend provided him with a separate room, the upstairs of a house facing his own.

Ramdas passed happily a period of about a month and a half in Umanathrao's delectable company. Umanathrao was a true philosopher. He lived a life of selfless service. He was simple and unassuming by nature. He held a British university degree in medicine. In a spirit of renunciation he had given up Government employment and had taken up private practice. He was greatly loved by all the people of Kundapur for his ready medical aid at all hours. He was kind and sympathetic towards all alike: rich and poor, old and young, high and low. He would not take any fee for his services from the poor, and even from the rich he would not accept any remuneration when he was not in need of money. He was entirely free from anger, guile and malice. He was extremely charitable. He would often speak of the world as only a play of God, and that the best way to live in it was to witness the game dispassionately. The light of divine love ever illumined his heart. When occasions arose, he would do the meanest service for the relief of his fellow-men. He also possessed a keen sense of humour and was remarkably witty. He was indeed a pure, godly and noble soul.

A month passed, and Ramdas reminded Umanathrao of the proposed trip to Kollur. Arrangements were at once made to start. Ramdas, Umanathrao and another friend, crossing a river by boat, came to the road leading to Kollur which lay through a dense forest. Here they boarded a bullock-cart. The path was narrow and rugged—cut through a vast extensive jungle spreading all along the way to Kollur. The jungle was infested with wild beasts. Kollur was reached without anything of importance having occurred on the way.

Kollur is a small village on a plateau bounded on three sides by tall mountains called Kotashadri hills. A dense forest of giant trees growing on these lofty and towering hills lent a peculiar majesty and fascination to the place. In the centre of the village is situated the shrine of Mukambika—the Mother of the universe. Umanathrao led Ramdas directly to the part of the outer building of the temple where the saint was lodging. Ramdas bowed down before the holy saint. He appeared to be over 70 years old. His eyes were large and greenish in tint and their expression was distant and listless but mingled with a gleam of tenderness and cheer. He owned a flowing grey beard that lent sanctity and light of wisdom to his full and beaming face. He was seen squatting on the floor, wearing only a kaupin. Having enquired after the welfare of the visitors he straightaway launched into religious talks.

He recounted a good many stories from Bhagawat and other sources. He discoursed eloquently upon bhakti or love of God. In the enthusiasm of the talks his body would convulse with spiritual rapture. At intervals he would shut his eyes and sit silent for a minute or two, his face lit up by a strange, spiritual glow. He referred to his body as a monkey prone to all sorts of tricks.

"Look here," he would say pointing to his body, "this monkey is often up to his tricks. The limbs get so cramped with rheumatism that they refuse to move about freely," and he would add with a chuckle, "the monkey is always full of chesta."

His legs were so weak that he could hardly walk without help. He lived alone and still was always cheerful and contented. His strictures upon worldly life were sharp and severe. The saint would keep the party engaged with his lofty discourses till late in the night. He would never get tired of talking about God and His glories. Whenever he was alone, he was observed to be busy writing down in pencil the name "Ram" with which he had filled up many note-books. Altogether, the stay with the saint lasted only three days. On the second day they were joined by a young but blind sadhu led in and attended on by an elderly widowed lady. The sadhu appeared to be about 20 or 22 years old. Owing to two cataract spots on the pupils he had become stone-blind. Dr. Umanathrao went up to him and examining his eyes gave him to understand that a simple operation would restore his sight, and that he was prepared to do that much for him. The sadhu turned round and said: "Kind Sir, I would have nothing of what you say. I am perfectly contented with the lot God has bestowed on me. What do I care for the external and perishable sight when the internal has opened? The former is a snare, and God through His infinite mercy has deprived me of it so that my inner vision may all the more be pure and glorious. I am happy and cheerful in the contemplation of the divine Lord who dwells in the hearts of all. May He always keep me in tune with Him."

As he spoke thus, his eyes, the light of which had gone out, were filled with tears and his face shone with a wonderful lustre.

The three days glided away most blissfully in the society of these saints. Before leaving the village the party visited the shrine of Mukambika. They returned to Kundapur. Stopping with Umanathrao for a fortnight more Ramdas left for Mangalore. On the way he halted for two days at Udipi where he met K. Anandrao, a pure soul living a retired life engaged in austerities. Ramdas enjoyed his most delightful company. Anandrao read out to him selected quotations from various philosophical works he had studied. In fact he poured into Ramdas the very essence of the highest truths. He was all love and kindness. In this connection, Ramdas cannot help mentioning the remarkable love and regard with which he was uniformly treated by all, including the members of the family to which he belonged in his past life.

Ramdas, during his stay at Udipi, took a stroll with a friend to a distant water-spring where he bathed. On return they paid a visit to the celebrated temple of Sri Krishna founded by Sri Madhvacharya, the great religious reformer of southern India.

(ii) The Power of God's Name

Stopping at Udipi for a couple of days Ramdas proceeded to Mangalore, where too he had to stay only for a short time. P. Anandrao, an elder brother of his former life, eagerly wished to take him to Kasaragod—a town to the south of Mangalore where he lived. At Ramdas' request he arranged to procure for his occupation a small room in a newly built dharmashala in the midst of three temples. In the vicinity of the temples were two tanks in which he would have the morning bath. Anandrao was very kind and loving. He was keen on Ramdas' comforts. The little room was fully equipped with the simple necessities of Ramdas' life. They consisted of a soft mat with a deer skin spread upon it, two ochre-coloured khaddar pieces, a couple of mats for visitors, a hurricane lantern, a country leaf umbrella, one copper water pot and some religious books. A piece of card-board was also nailed to the wall above his seat with the divine Ram-mantram written in bold Kanarese characters thereon. Ramdas gives these details since a strange event that happened has a close bearing upon them. His diet was milk, fruits and plain boiled rice.

During the first few days, crowds of visitors gathered round the rest-house to see him; of these, school-boys formed the majority. Many earnest devotees of God also visited him. In the nights he was often taken out to attend kirtan parties where the popular devotional songs of the great Indian saints were sung. These songs contained the essence of the sublime Hindu philosophy. They treated of devotion, knowledge and renunciation. Their direct mode of appeal elevated the mind and filled it with divine fervour. Among the hymns the most popular were those of Kabir and Tukaram. Indeed their poems were rare gems of spiritual thought in which were blended perfect rhythm, lofty idealism and pure emotion.

In the afternoon Ramdas was engaged in reading the English translation of Tulsidas Ramayana and rendering it in the vernacular for the benefit of the devotees who thronged the small room. They were imbibing with avidity the spiritual nectar provided by Tulsidas in his immortal work.

One day a young man, weighed down by despondency and despair, came to Ramdas. He recounted the tale of his woe. Ramdas advised him to repeat the Ram-mantram and assured him that all would be well. The friend would thereafter visit Ramdas every day, and he was found immersed in the japa of Ram-nam. A few days passed and he came to Ramdas with a cheerful face and told him that the impending calamity that threatened him had passed off without scathing him in the least. All victory to that powerful Name! The Name of the Lord has undoubtedly the power of dispelling ignorance, pain and misery. So saints all over the world are never tired of glorifying the Name.

One early morning two old visitors who had retired from active life came to see Rámdas. They started a cosy little chat over their domestic worries.

"The thatching season has come," one was saying to the other. "I have been on the lookout for grass bundles for the purpose but could not procure any, as grass-vendors could be rarely seen. I am much worried."

"That is nothing," cried out the other. "My trouble is worse. Our front-gate needs repair. Stray buffaloes get free access to my garden and lay waste every blessed thing I have planted. I called in carpenters for mending the gate but they slipped out of my hands like eels. I can hardly sleep in peace at night."

So on and so forth *ad infinitum*. Ramdas listened for a time to their frank exchange of confidences regarding their private troubles. He felt he was one too many on the spot and realized that they would better enjoy themselves without the presence of a third party who had no interest in their discourse. So he quietly glided out of the room and made his way with rapid strides to the top of a hill outside the town. Rambling for an hour he retraced his steps to his little room. But where were the birds? They had flown away. However, they dropped in again the same evening and beseeched him to forgive them for their indiscretion in discussing their private worries, in his presence, at his retreat.

With all the sweetness that Ramdas could command he said: "The room in which Ramdas lives is open to all, for, people who are beset with worldly troubles may freely resort to it and gain peace and calmness through the remembrance of God. On the other hand, if they come to the room with a bundle of their cares and opening it spread out its contents, they are simply denying themselves the much needed solace which the room would otherwise yield."

In one voice they agreed with what Ramdas said, and promised not to commit the blunder again.

(iii) God Assumes All Forms

Another extraordinary experience worth narrating in some detail befell Ramdas. About ten o'clock in the night on a rainy day, a strange looking individual entered his room. Besides his being clothed in rags, his hair was dishevelled. He had with him a small bundle suspended on a rough palm stick. He looked as if he were demented. He came in and took his seat near Ramdas.

"May I rest here tonight?" he asked in a queer sing-song manner. Ramdas said that he was quite welcome.

He sat on the mat and opened his bundle which contained a bizzarre assortment of small bits of cloth in varied colours. Taking out the rags he scattered them on the ground. Then glancing at Ramdas he laughed a merry laugh.

Ramdas thought to himself: "O Lord, Thou cometh in wonderful disguises." After a while the strange visitor gathering up the scraps remade the bundle. Next approaching Ramdas he chanted the burden of a popular Kanarese song, the purport of which was: "Thou art the ever pure, all-merciful and mysterious Govinda." He sang forth this verse in his own peculiarly passionate and impressive style. He spoke in the Kanarese tongue. Suddenly, stopping his music, he directly looked at Ramdas' face and said: "You see, my clothes are old and worn out. Would you not part with the one you are using, for me?" pointing to the cloth worn by Ramdas.

Ramdas at once divesting himself of the cloth handed it over to him. The visitor carefully folded it and laid it besides him.

In an imperious voice he spoke next: "Now let us sleep. Reduce the light. Mind you, don't put it out." Obediently Ramdas carried out his bidding. He laid himself down pretending to sleep, and Ramdas followed suit. Five minutes had not elapsed when he sprang into a sitting posture calling on Ramdas to do the same. Ramdas yielded. The light was made brighter.

"I have yet to demand something more," he said.

"Everything in this room," Ramdas replied, "is Ram's property, and since you are He you have a right to it. You may freely ask and take."

Meanwhile, Ramdas had covered himself with the other spare cloth.

"I need also the cloth you have just put on," and he stretched forth his hand. Without a word Ramdas surrendered up the second cloth.

Some minutes passed and he said: "I have need for a water pot. If you have no objection, you may give the one over there," —pointing to the vessel in the corner of the room. Emptying the pot of itswater, Ramdas passed it on to him. As desired by him, Ramdas made up the things into a bundle. Then he called for the mat, the deer skin, the lantern, the umbrella, the spare langot, one after the other, at almost regular intervals.

Ramdas felt that God was out to test him if he had any sense of possession still left. His dedicated life did not admit of any attachment to things of the world. Whenever he gave away the things to this strange friend, he did so in a spirit of delightful spontaneity. With a rising emotion he addressed the visitor: "O Lord, Thy tests are wonderful. Everything is Thine and Thine alone." At this, the visitor broke out into his usual offhand laughter. He demanded also a few religious books which were in the room. All articles were tied up in a cloth and formed a pretty big bundle.

Later he said with a note of warning in his voice:

"Look here, you have given me many valuable articles. It is possible, when I am gone with them, you might regret your folly. What say you?"

"No, not at all," quickly responded Ramdas, "since you are taking away your own things, Ramdas has no cause for regret."

"Now, then," he broke out, "give me that board on the wall." It also went to swell the bundle.

The room was now almost empty. Being monsoon it began to pour heavily. The night had advanced and it was about 3 a.m. Ramdas had nothing on except a kaupin.

"One thing more," he still cried. "I may also require the pair of spectacles you have on." The pair of spectacles was duly handed over to him, on examining which he remarked that it would fit him.

"Yet one thing more," he said.

"You may demand anything," replied Ramdas. "Ramdas has dedicated his entire life to thee."

"Pass me the kaupin you are wearing," he asked calmly.

It was beyond any doubt now that God Himself was here for a crucial test. Ramdas with perfect nonchalance born of complete self-surrender loosened the kaupin from his otherwise naked body to offer it to him. But before Ramdas had removed it outright, the strange friend stopped him with his hand saying: "No, no, you may retain it, I need it not." He then eagerly asked, "Can you follow me?"

Ramdas lost no time in replying: "By all means."

"Not now, some other time," he said and prepared to start. It was now raining in torrents. In one hand he held the lantern and in the other the umbrella, and the palm pole flung across his shoulder with the bundle suspended on it, at his back.

Standing on the landing steps he flashed a parting shot. "What do you think of me? I am not mad. I am not," he said with great emphasis.

"You are He, you are He," gasped out Ramdas—his throat fully choked with emotion.

The friend descended the steps and walked away.

Ramdas returned to the room and the moment he sat down on the floor, he was lost in a deep trance. It was broad daylight when he recovered from the trance. He beheld quite a crowd swarming at his door, of whom Anandrao was one. The news had been conveyed to them by the servant who was bringing for Ramdas his morning milk and fruit. They assumed that a thief must have decamped with all the missing articles from the room. They inquired of him how it had all happened.

Ramdas only replied: "The Lord Ram provides through one form and takes away through another."

This brief and enigmatic explanation did not, of course, satisfy them. So he had to give out a detailed account of the incident of the previous night. All listened to the story with breathless interest. One of them suggested that the rogue should be hunted down and captured.

"For what fault of his?" asked Ramdas. "He has taken only his own things. There is no law on earth," added he, "that can punish him for it. He is not a rogue. He is the Lord Himself."

An irrepressible smile lit up the faces of all who heard him. They seemed to have understood him and quietly dispersed. Before noon the same day, Anandrao, all kindness and love as he was, furnished the room afresh, so that it looked again as if nothing had been removed from it. A few days later, the new waterpot had to be substituted by another, the second one having gone into the possession of an itinerant sannyasini who was badly in need of one.

Anandrao sought to replace the pair of spectacles but Ramdas declined saying:

"The Lord has deprived Ramdas of the spectacles because he may not need them in future. His will be done."

Ever since then Ramdas has been doing without spectacles, as his sight has been completely restored.

One evening, while Ramdas was reading the treatise on raja yoga by Swami Vivekananda, a desire arose in his heart to practise pranayama. No sooner did this thought flit across his mind than a young raja yogi stepped into the room and sat beside him. Ramdas at once saw that the Lord had sent the yogi to instruct him in this great science.

That very night the raja yogi initiated Ramdas into the mysteries of raja vidya or royal science as he called it. Thenceforth Ramdas was mostly occupied in the practice of asana and pranayama. As the practice went on, he experienced a dead stillness and peace overtaking him. Accordingly, the incentive to reading and talk vanished. He became composed and silent. This change was marked and remarked upon by the daily visitors. Hunger, hitherto dormant, was aroused, and he had to take larger quantities of food than usual—the rule of satwic diet being broken. Under the strain of incessant practice of pranayama he felt great physical weakness. A craving for solitude now seized him, so that he might undergo the new experiences in an undisturbed place. He proposed the change to Anandrao who immediately arranged to shift him to a place about two miles from Kasaragod.

CHAPTER III

KUDLU — KADRI HILL

(i) Pranayama

Kudlu is a countryside two miles to the north of Kasaragod. Ramdas was lodged in a tiled house of three rooms on the slope of a valley, above which was an extensive uninhabited plateau, green with verdure and shrubs. At the foot of the house was a shallow excavation, from one side of which was flowing down a narrow jet of pure sparkling water, supplied by a hidden spring. Majestic silence reigned over the valley. It was a fit abode for undisturbed meditation. God willed that Ramdas should live in such a place.

In right earnest Ramdas started the practice of pranayama. For long hours he would sit up for the exercise. He became in regard to food highly eccentric. The supplies came from Anandrao who was visiting him every morning to look after his needs. His pure love made him bear with remarkable patience Ramdas' innumerable freaks and fancies in the matter of diet. He changed his diet from day to day from one thing to another, and at last, went for some days on mere water-fast. Then he would again revert to the usual means.

These experiments in diet coupled with incessant practice of pranayama reduced his body and gradually weakened it. The mind lapsed into a state of perfect listlessness and torpor. It seemed to have descended into the very depths of inexpressible stillness and silence. On and on the practice continued. The utterance of the mantram stopped entirely. All the hours of the day and night were devoted, almost without break, for control of breath. At times due to over-exhaustion he would drop down an emaciated and limp figure. The raja yogi who initiated him came on a visit. He watched the keen struggle through which he was passing and encouraged him on. He advised Ramdas to feed the body properly. One thing, however, became evident to Ramdas—this exercise was dealing a death-blow to memory, reason and the subtler emotions of the heart. The mind became blank and arid—inactivity and silence was the result.

It was the will of the Lord that Ramdas should also gain this experience of pranayama—a mode of mind-control prescribed by the great sage Patanjali. This discipline forms a part of ashtanga yoga as taught by the sage. It is incumbent on the aspirant, that he should follow all the eight rules of the yoga together, of which asana and pranayama are two. Brahmacharya or continence is held to be absolutely necessary, as also a watchful guidance from an experienced teacher of yoga. The path is not meant for all people. Householders, engaged in the affairs of life, will do well to avoid it. For, failure in observance of the rules of this yoga is likely to cause derangement of the brain and other diseases. For the householder the most suitable discipline for concentration of mind is repetition of the divine Name and devotional music, in other words, the path of bhakti or devotion. The practice of pranayama continued unabated for a month, and then Ramdas gave it up. The usual repetition of the mantram became once more an automatic function of the tongue. Activity returned, and he took long walks on the meadow both in the morning and evening. He wandered aimlessly. The extensive view of the green vegetation all around absorbed him. He witnessed his own loneliness—his mind resting on the bosom of the motionless spirit of tranquillity. The world about him looked like a vast glistening canvas on which pictures of variegated tints were laid by a master artist—the green earth below and the blue expanse above were bathed in the bright glory of the sun.

In the course of his rambles he was accosted by a Muslim: "Why do you come near our habitation? Our children get frightened on seeing you. Will it not be better for you to adhere to your solitary retreat?"

Ramdas heard and passed on.

On another occasion he unconsciously directed his steps towards the seaside which lay about a mile and a half from the retreat. He had to pass through a small village peopled by Muslims. When he was walking along one of the streets, a number of Muslim boys clustered round him and stopped his progress. They began to pat on his head, pull his ears and nose, make faces at and dance round him. He liked the fun and also danced in wild delight with them. All the while, some Muslim mothers were observing the scene from a distance. Thinking that the boys were harassing Ramdas, they rushed forward and drove them away.

He continued his stroll to the seashore. He sat on the sands looking on the giant waves rolling noisily and lashing against the rocks on the shore. He remained for a time in a state of complete abstraction as his eyes swept on the limitless azure sheet of water before him. Then he retraced his steps to his abode.

(ii) The Battle of the Elements

In this blissful and undisturbed retreat, insects and birds freely gave Ramdas the joy of their society. They would unhesitatingly enter the rooms and play about fearlessly. They seemed to have instinctively understood that he was their friend. Surely, for Ramdas they were manifestations of the great Truth that he adored and loved. He would share his eatables with them.

At this place, as inspired by the Lord, he composed some poems, prayers and essays. These have already been published in the book "At the Feet of God."

The season being monsoon the nights were attended with heavy showers. One memorable night the rainfall was unusually violent. There were deafening peals of thunder preceded by flashes of lightning. Rain and storm raged in all their fury. A mass of rushing water was dashing against the sides of the house. Every thunder-crash shook the building to its very foundation. The maddened wind was whistling through the shutterless windows beating torrential showers of rain into the room. In the midst of this warfare of the elemental gods, Ramdas was seated unmoved in the room, in a state of perfect exaltation, watching the progress of the terriffic scene. Every situation of dread and danger only hardened the fibre of his being. The terrors of the storm did not affect him. The Truth —God within him—spoke out:

"I am in the storm, the wind and the rain. I am in the thunder and the lightning. I am the active creator, the merciful protector and the ruthless destroyer. I am all in all. I am all."

The storm still raged on. Ramdas heard a sudden thud on the floor about two yards from where he sat. He turned in the direction from which the sound came and discovered a big wild cat, black as jet, standing with a fixed gaze at him. It had jumped down from the top of the wall. Its lustrous eyes gleamed in the dim corner of the room. Ramdas at once stood up and taking the lantern walked towards it. It was about twice the size of an ordinary cat—tall, gaunt and ferocious. It did not await Ramdas' approach. It leapt on the nearest window sill and, wriggling out through the iron bars, disappeared into the rain and darkness outside. Till morning Ramdas enjoyed the glorious battle of the elements.

One evening a devotee from Kasaragod came to fetch him. It was arranged to perform a nagar bhajan. He, in the company of a saint belonging to the Sri Krishna Chaitanya cult of Bengal and other devotees, danced to the music of nama sankirtan in the street procession. Ever since this event he was frequently coming to the town. On one occasion he had the darshan of Swami Shivananda, the preceptor of the raja yogi who initiated him into pranayama.

After his return to Kasaragod, Ramdas had a three days' water-fast during which he stopped with an old devout mother in the town. The fast broken, he proceeded again to Mangalore and stopped for some time on the Kadri hill.

(iii) Enter Ramcharandas

Ramdas reached Mangalore by an evening train and directly made his way to the Kadri hill. He came to a dharmashala, situated close to the famous seven tanks. The rest-house was in charge of a young boy by name Madhav. The boy welcomed him with unfeigned delight. He offered Ramdas a deer skin on which he took his seat on a raised platform. Madhav was a well-built and healthy lad. He conceived a great and abiding love and regard for Ramdas. His perfect trust enabled him to lay before Ramdas the story of his life. He narrated: He lost his mother when he was still a little child, and was thus thrown adrift into the world. He passed under the care of his relations from place to place. So, his higher education was neglected. His elder brother had disappeared many years ago and his whereabouts were unknown. His father, a petty clerk in some office, was touring with his officer in the district. He was without a home. The boy had a religious turn of mind from his childhood. He frequented kirtan parties and sought the society of sadhus. His inherent craving for freedom and peace was thus intensified. He prayed to God to grant him a situation in which he could spend all his time in devotion.

Ramdas found that the boy's nature was pure and lovable. He was put in charge of the rest-house by a merchant of the city who provided him with his bare needs. His time was his own which he spent in meditation. He was indeed an earnest seeker after Truth. He was simple and guileless. Ramdas felt a strange attraction for him at the very first sight. He questioned Ramdas how he could control the restless mind. Ramdas gave him the Ram-mantram and, thereafter, the mantram was always on his lips.

On Ramdas' expressing to him his desire to remain in a perfectly solitary place, Madhav suggested the cave just a few yards above the dharmashala on the hill. This cave had been newly rebuilt by raising mud walls at its entrance. Ramdas leaving his seat asked the boy to lead him to the cave. The cave was a narrow and low hole just sufficient for one person to lie down. The mud walls were still undried and the floor was damp. It had a small doorway with shutters. Ramdas entered the cave and told Madhav that he had decided to spend in it the night and some days more. Madhav spread the deer skin on the floor of the cave, and then returned to the rest-house.

Madhav was all kindness to him. He served him in every possible way, but there was something weighing on his mind, and he looked worried. Ramdas found out that he had a debt of a few rupees. God arranged for it and set him free.

Ramdas' stay in the cave was marked with many periods of fasting. But for his extreme physical weakness during the fasts, he was perfectly at ease and cheerful. It must be noted here that whenever God inspired him to undertake a fast he experienced great elation, similar to what a hungry man would feel when he was provided with a sumptuous feast.

In all, he remained in the cave for about a month and a half. He received visits from many devotees of the city. He also went occasionally to the city in the evenings to attend kirtan parties. Once he was invited to a marriage function. A girl in the house was bed-ridden on account of serious illness. Ramdas saw her and prayed to the girl's father to entertain the poor of the town with a dinner in the name of God and for the sake of the ailing girl. Generous-hearted man as he was, he agreed to the suggestion. He said that he had already resolved to do so. The feeding of the poor came about in due course, but Ramdas was not in Mangalore for the occasion, as he had left the place earlier. A year later he learnt that the suffering girl had recovered soon after the feeding of the poor. Trust in God is always rewarded.

Meanwhile, Madhav had developed a great attachment for Ramdas. One day Ramdas told him that the Lord willed that His child, that is Ramdas, should take once more to a wandering life. Now the boy appealed, in a piteous voice, that he might also be permitted to go with him. He added that it would be utter misery for him to live separated from Ramdas. At this Ramdas warned him:

"Well, Ram, the path which Ramdas follows is a hard one. For him danger and death have no terror. You must know that he is a reckless, wild and fearless wanderer. He deliberately courts suffering because he has discovered joy in it. Your case is different. So be advised. Do not seek to accompany him."

Madhav would not yield to persuasion. He was very obstinate. He assured Ramdas that he was prepared to go through any trial in his company, but would never give him up. Ramdas had to acquiesce.

Ramdas decided to start on foot on a long travel to the north, via Gokarn—an important place of pilgrimage on the west coast of India—and informed Madhav about it. Madhav got things ready for the journey. He equipped himself with some cooking utensils and foodstuffs which he shoved into a scrip prepared for the purpose. At this stage he made a request to Ramdas. He desired to change his name, and wanted Ramdas to suggest a new one. Ramdas gave him the name Ramcharandas which he adopted from that time forward. So Ramdas will refer to him henceforth as Ramcharandas.

CHAPTER IV

TOWARDS GOKARN—GOKARN

(i) Institution—a Bondage

On a moonlit night at about three o'clock in the morning, Ramdas and Ramcharandas left Mangalore. Ramdas walked at a brisk pace with Ramcharandas close at his heels. They passed through many villages, and at midday made a halt in the vicinity of a few thatched huts underneath a grove of cocoanut trees. There was a well close by. Ramcharandas prepared some khichadi. After finishing meals they rested for about two hours in the cool shade of the trees. Then they prosecuted their journey. In the evening they arrived at a mofussil town—Moolky where Ramcharandas escorted Ramdas to the house of one of his relations. They lodged for the night with the friends who were very hospitable. Ramcharandas' aunt, who was there, dissuaded him from going with Ramdas. They presented to him in lurid colours the discomforts and difficulties of a sadhu's life, but they could not induce him to change his mind.

Next day at dawn the Sadhus proceeded on their travel and reached Udipi where they put up for the night with Srinivasarao, Ramdas' younger brother in the former life. Leaving Udipi the next morning they came to Kalyanpur at midday where they were welcomed with great joy by a bhakta. They proceeded onward. From early dawn to 11 a.m. and then from 3 p.m. until dark they tramped on day after day. At Kundapur they halted at the dispensary of Rama Bhatji, a friend of H. Umanathrao, who had shuffled off his mortal coil a few months before their visit.

Crossing the Gangolly ferry they came at noon to a hamlet called Kirimanjeshwar. Here they stopped near a Shiva temple. On the bank of a large tank, in which they bathed, they refreshed themselves with food cooked by the ever willing Ramcharandas. The scenery of the place was charming. The place was close to the sea. The roar of the rolling waves could be heard at a short distance. The land was covered with an extensive forest bounded by hills. Tradition has it that the spot was sanctified in ancient days by the austerities of Agastya Muni. So, that part of village bears the name of Agastyamuni Ashram. The pujaris of the temple declared that the water of the tank possessed wonderful virtues. The water was indeed pure and sweet in spite of the washing and bathing for which it was used by the villagers. Ramdas was greatly captivated by the singular fascination of this place. After resting for sometime they started again. They passed through Byndoor and Bhatkal and reached Shirali. Here Ramcharandas proposed to visit the famous Saraswat Chitrapur math. It was God's will that Ramdas should only wait in the jungle outside the math buildings while Ramcharandas entered the math. After a while he returned with bhiksha.

Chitrapur math is a religious institution belonging to the enterprising and intelligent Saraswat community in which Ramdas had his old birth. The religious head or guru of the community has his headquarters in Chitrapur. The present head of the math is a young man of great purity, character and spirit. Ramdas had the good fortune of having his darshan in the Kasaragod ashram. The late guru was conservative in his methods of control over the community, but he was a great tapaswi. His successor, the present Swami, possesses a broad outlook and has relaxed the stringent rules of the previous regime.

No institution can justify its existence if it does not keep abreast of the changing times. Evolution is the law of life and change is its keynote. While stagnation means deterioration and misery, progress denotes freedom and happiness. The former stands for discord and chaos and the latter for harmony and peace. Religion points to the vision of God—the supreme liberation and bliss born of the immortal. This vision is not circumscribed by tradition and doctrine because it transcends all limitations. The rules of life should be so set and adjusted that they might admit of being outgrown when the keen hunger of the soul seeks utter freedom in God. If this truth is ignored, life becomes a complex tangle in which the soul is caught enchained and helpless—hopelessly struggling to be free from the net of its own making.

The seed must have a ground so prepared that it might break through the soil and spring out into growth. Also favourable conditions have to be provided for the plant to evolve into a tree, then into flowers and lastly fruits. It must not be forgotten that fruit is the consummation of the seed. So an institution is the garden where every facility for the cultivation of the soul in its march towards its fruition is provided, so that the soul might ultimately transcend the institution for the higher, true and complete vision of life—just as the tree outgrows its fence and spreads its branches freely in the air, or as the pupil outgrows the school life for that of the world. Else an institution becomes at once an organized bondage and an incubus that warp and crush the healthy evolution of life to its destined goal of freedom and joy.

Ramcharandas and Ramdas marched onward. Talk between them was scarce. Ramdas exhorted the boy to keep on uttering the Ram-mantram. After some halts on the way they at last reached Gokarn.

(ii) Guru and Chela

Gokarn is a place of pilgrimage because of its noted shrine of Mahadev. It is on the seacoast—the temple being about a furlong from the seashore. The structure of the temple is extensive and of ancient model. The most important annual festival of the temple is Shivaratri. Ramdas had arrived there about a fortnight prior to this day of celebration. Pilgrims from various parts of the country were now pouring in for this great occasion.

Ramcharandas and Ramdas reached here at midday. They were invited for dinner at the house of a prominent merchant of the place where they were treated with great kindness and love. Then they went to the temple of Mahadev and saw a crowd of pilgrims at the entrance in the outer yard. Pilgrim sadhus were scrambling for place on either side of the main door of the temple. For, here it was that they received the greatest attention from the pilgrims who came with offerings.

"Swamiji, let us also settle down here—there is still room for us," suggested Ramcharandas.

"Ram," replied Ramdas, 'what if we pitch upon a retired and secluded spot? That seems to be the right thing."

"No, Swamiji," interrupted Ramcharandas, "this is the best place for us, since we have the double advantage of being near the murti of Mahadev and also having the society of the sadhus."

His reason proved unassailable, and Ramdas submitted. A portion of the ground was immediately cleared of its pebbles and loose earth by him, and some spare cloths were spread on it to signify that the place had been booked and marked. Night came on. They took their seats on the coveted piece of ground. Ramcharandas felt proud of their enviable position since it lay only second in the line to the right-hand side of the main entrance. The first position was occupied by two sadhus —one elderly and the other young. Before dark both the sides of the doorway, up to the extremity of the wall, were filled by sadhus. Of the sadhus to their left, the elder was the guru and the younger the chela.

"Ramgiri—prepare the chilam," said the guru a gruff and authoritative voice to his chela.

"All right, maharaj-ji," replied the chela meekly.

The chela released a satchel from his shoulder, and extracted from it two small pouches, a chilam or earthen pipe, a coil of coir rope and a match box. From one of the pouches he took out a compressed lump of green leaves—ganja, and placing it tenderly upon his left palm, soaked it freely with water from his lota. After removing the seeds and squeezing the water out, he opened the other pouch and, inserting his fingers, took out a goodly pinch of dry yellow tobacco. Then he mixed the tobacco with the rinsed ganja on his palm.

Now pressing the mixture into a bit of a cake he laid it on his thigh. Next he cut out a small length of the coir rope and, making it into a ring, set fire to it. While it was burning he filled the chilam with the mixture of ganja and tobacco. The coir ring—burnt into red live cinder—he swiftly carried with his fingers to the mouth of the chilam. "Maharaj-ji," he called out to his guru who was now deeply engaged in a talk with another sadhu, who had come from the other side, seeing the active preparation for a ganja smoke. The chela offered the chilam to his guru.

With eyes red with anger the guru growled at his chela: "Idiot, where is my safi?" (i.e., the small piece of cloth used at the smoking end of the chilam.) "How dare you offer me the chilam without it?—you fool."

The chela—like a scared animal—searched for the rag while, all the time, his guru was fuming with rage. However, he got the thing and no sooner had he wetted it than the guru snatched it away from him and rolled it on the nether end of the chilam. But before taking it to his lips, in a loud and shrill voice he chanted out the usual invocation to Shankar, the Lord of Kailas:

"Bom — Bom — Mahadev — Kailaspati — Bholanath — Shankar," etc. He then lifted the pipe to his mouth and took a prolonged pull at it, giving vent, at the same time, to a sharp hissing noise. Lowering the pipe he let out the smoke from his upturned mouth, as if it were the funnel of a railway engine belching out a cloud of smoke.

The chilam was now handed to the guest, the other sadhu, who was awaiting his turn with the eyes of a hawk. While he was manipulating the chilam the guruji by way of digression said:

"Ramgiri is a perfect ass," referring to his chela. "He is a stupid and useless fellow. He was worse but has improved somewhat since he fell into my company."

These words of the guru seemed to have entered like iron into the soul of the chela. They must have rankled and boiled his interior. He flushed red and his tightly compressed lips showed that he was trying to suppress his feelings. His turn of chilam came. He took it out of the guest-sadhu, and having his own safi, for the guru would always consider it below his dignity to allow the chela to use his safi, commenced smoking. Again it was guruji's turn and it was handed to him. A few minutes passed. The ganja had started its work on the brain of the smokers. While its intoxication lulled the mind of the guru, it raised the spirit of revolt in the chela. His long pent-up wrath—a flame nourished by the constant insults and ill-treatment of his guru—burst in all its fury. With a look of withering scorn and contemptuous smile at his guru, he broke out:

"I have had enough of you, you beast. For twelve long years have I borne the insults you heaped on me—you were cruel and heartless. You treated me worse than a dog. All along I was meek, submissive and obedient. I served you sincerely to the best of my ability. I thought at first I could, by serving you, understand the ways of devotion and knowledge. I craved for a life of freedom based upon the vision of God. I have now found out that you are merely an adventurer, vile and despicable, ignorant and conceited,—but too late. For, the vice of ganja smoking you taught me has enslaved me and bound me to your hateful person. I struggled hard many a time to break away from you but in vain. I am inextricably caught in the clutches of this fell vice—and you, wretch, have brought about this ruin for your selfish ends. The intoxication of this soul-destroying drug has weakened my will, destroyed my memory and distorted my reasoning faculty. I began to babble incoherently like a maniac under its influence. I knew I was going down and down into a bottomless pit of perdition—dragged down by your pitiless hands. 'O God,' I used to cry out often, 'save me, save me.' In spite of my unchanged condition, I trusted Him. I was sure He would help me out. The day has come. I give you up for good. God has at last called me away. All praise to Thee, O Lord."

Now his eyes were wet with tears, he was trembling like a leaf in the wind. He stood up, made straight for the outer entrance, and passing out vanished into the darkness.

This scene was intently watched by all the sadhus. Ramdas turned to Ramcharandas and asked:

"What do you think of it, Ram?"

"I did not bargain for this disturbance," he replied.

"Whereas Ramdas enjoyed it all—it was a play worth witnessing. However, what do you say to a move tomorrow?"

"Why not, by all means," quickly rejoined Ramcharandas.

Meanwhile a quarrel was in progress between the guest-sadhu—who had sneaked away when Ramgiri was growing hot in his denunciation of his guru—and another sadhu, his neighbour, who appeared to have encroached upon his room during his short absence. They created quite a racket. The night was spent in pandemonium.

Ramdas and Ramcharandas abandoned the place next morning and came out of the temple. Having finished their midday meal at another devotee's house, who was also kind and hospitable, they wended their way to the beach-side. They discovered on the beach a vast enclosure and some buildings in it. On enquiry they learnt that it was a Brahmachari ashram. Ramdas wished to pay a visit to the ashram and both of them entered the main gate, and going up to an open outhouse, took their seat on a low bench inside. Shortly after this, two young men clad in ochre-coloured robes put in an appearance and advancing towards the visitors saluted them.

Ramdas felt very happy to see them, because they looked so fresh and healthy—the light of brahmacharya beaming on their face. Ramdas expressed these feelings to them and inquired after their guru. One of them replied that their guru was away from Gokarn, collecting funds for the upkeep of the ashram.

He said: "We have a goshala which keeps us engaged in attending on the cows. We have also to work in the garden, as we are growing our own vegetables."

At the speaker's hint, the other brahmachari left them and returned after a few minutes with two aluminium cups full of buttermilk.

"Kindly accept this drink—it is prepared out of the milk of our ashram cows," they pleaded.

Ramdas and Ramcharandas with great delight drank the beverage which tasted like nectar. Then bidding the young men adieu, they left the ashram.

(iii) Fine Joke—Indeed!

It was by now about four o'clock in the afternoon and they were on the sands facing the roaring sea. As Ramdas looked round, his eyes rested on the hill close by projecting into the sea.

Turning to Ramcharandas he said: "Ram, let us go up that hill and see if we can find a place to spend the night. From the top of the hill we can also have a fine view of the sea and land."

Ramcharandas agreeing, they walked in the direction of the hill. They had to wade through the waves on the shore—the waters were not deep. They reached the landing and climbed up a slope, and came upon a small reservoir of water the supply of which was kept constant by a never failing spring. They drank at the spout the cool and sweet water and proceeded further up. Here was a small temple of a devi. They were told by the pujari that the spring and the tank went by the name Ramatirtha. They proceeded past the spring higher still, Ramdas leading the way. A few yards further progress brought them on the top of the hill which was a vast undulating plateau. At a distance of about a furlong from where they stood, they descried on the highest level an oblong solid structure of stone. Ramdas silently tramped on towards it—closely followed by Ramcharandas.

When they reached the structure they found that it was cut out of one solid mass of rock—the roof was a low dome formed of the same rock as its thick walls. They entered the rock chamber. It was cubical in dimensions, the floor area being about ten feet square. The interior of the dome resembled a hollow cup. Entrance was from two narrow arched passages sufficiently high, directly facing each other in the opposite walls.

"Ram," explained Ramdas to Ramcharandas, "we shall occupy this place for the nights during our stay in Gokarn."

Ramcharandas looked round and the prospect did not appeal to him, for a cold breeze was blowing over the spot from the direction of the sea.

"Cold will be extreme here in the night," he remarked.

"We are out to bear sufferings in the name of God," put in Ramdas, "at least that is the secret of Ramdas' life. Let us cheerfully face the situation in which God has chosen to place us."

He kept silent which meant half consent. After a time he suggested: "Swamiji, to provide against the cold let us at least have a fire. There is a little way off down on the slope, a grove of trees. We can collect from beneath them a sufficient quantity of dry twigs to serve our purpose for the night."

Ramdas consenting, both set out in the direction of the trees and collected in their cloths a pretty large quantity of twigs, and returned to the rock chamber.

Presently the sun was setting in the far horizon illuminating the hill and all the space around it with its golden effulgence. Ramdas stood still facing the sea. It was a gorgeous sight. A silent prayer went up from him to the throne of the almighty Lord of such lavish grandeur and beauty that it merged him in His blissful omnipresence. Night gradually threw her dark mantle over land and sea. He turned to the rock chamber. The breeze had now developed into a gale, Ramcharandas was engaged in making a fire. On peeping into the chamber, Ramdas saw that the impatient boy had struck about half a dozen matches to light the dry twigs, and he had failed. The strong breeze which blew into the chamber would not permit of a fire. Even the twigs were swept away by the wind. The cold had also increased. Ramcharandas was not to be easily foiled. He struck match after match fighting at the same time to keep the twigs in their place, but all to no avail. He threw the empty match-box down in utter disgust, and turning to Ramdas, with a face completely devoid of cheer, cried vehemently:

"Swamiji, no fire for the night!"

The gale had now developed into a hurricane. Even the cloth on the body could not be retained; the wind was icy cold. They sought refuge in one of the corners of the chamber. Even there the wind blew with all its force.

"Nice mess we are in," grumbled Ramcharandas, struggling to keep the coverlet tight on his body.

The humour of the situation struck Ramdas more than anything else, and he could not resist a hearty laugh.

"It is God's will, Ram. He means always well," consoled Rámdas.

The night was pitch-dark and escape from the place was out of the question. Ramcharandas drawing deep breaths crept towards Ramdas and, in the posture of a rabbit at feed, stuck close to him.

"Ram, what is the fun?" Ramdas asked.

"Fine joke, indeed!" he growled. "Rather than spend the nights here, also tomorrow and the subsequent days of our sojourn in Gokarn, we had better show a clean pair of heels to Gokarn as soon as the day breaks."

At this Ramdas rolled on the floor with uncontrollable laughter, and Ramcharandas had this time the good humour to join in the merriment.

"Tomorrow's question be for tomorrow," said Ramdas.

"Now about the present. Keep on repeating Ram-mantram. Since there is no fear of sleep encroaching upon the japa, let us fill the hours with the Lord's remembrance.

Although the lips were shivering with cold, the japa went on at an incredibly brisk rate. After all, every circumstance in which God places us has its own advantages, if we would only see. Morning dawned. As the first streaks of light from the rising sun dispelled the gloom of darkness, a voice filtered out from within the coverlet of Ramcharandas. He had fully enveloped himself with the cloth clutching at its corners with a dogged pertinacity.

"Swamiji, what does Ram want us to do next? If I may suggest. ...."

Ramdas anticipating what he was driving at, said:

"Yes, Ram, we shall leave Gokarn and proceed still further north. Let us start."

At these words Ramcharandas well-nigh bounded from the corner in which he had cooped himself. Shouldering his arm-bag and taking up the water vessel or lota, he was ready in an instant to set out. They descended and came upon the main road. A ten-mile walk brought them to a spring and tank in the midst of a jungle. Here they made a halt and, with the provisions Ramcharandas carried, he prepared some roties and dal. A bath at the cool spring and the simple fare refreshed them. They rested on the grass under the shade of trees till the rigour of the hot sun abated.

CHAPTER V

GOA FRONTIER—SUPA

(i) Orange robe counts for a badge of thieves

Onward they went until they reached Karwar where they stopped at a dharmashala. Next morning they resumed their journey. About four o'clock in the evening they sighted a river which they had to cross. Here they witnessed a wondrous spectacle. Thousands of men, women and children had assembled on both the banks of the river and still larger numbers were streaming to the spot from opposite directions. On enquiry they learnt that in mid-river were half a dozen crafts floating, and a famous sadhu by name, Satchidanand, was in one of them, and the large crowds of people had come for his darshan.

Each pilgrim carried with him or her a cocoanut, perfumed pastilles or agarbattis and some camphor, as offerings to the sadhu. The devotion of these simple country-folk was indeed marvellous. Truly, faith strikes its deep roots more easily in the unsophisticated minds of villagers than in those of the so-called civilised people of the cities.

The river was duly crossed, and Ramdas and Ramcharandas reached in the evening a village where they stopped for the night in the temple of a goddess. Here they had come near the Goa province—a Portuguese territory, the frontier lying a few miles off. Next day by noon they arrived at the frontier. When they were about to pass the gate, their progress was rudely arrested by a huge dog which stood on the path, barking ominously at them. From a hut, a few yards to the right, a man called out.

"You cannot pass unless you give an account of yourselves here—come here, both of you."

Accordingly, they went up to the hut. The man, a Roman Catholic, was the gate-keeper. He explained, on seeing their clothing dyed in gerrua, that the Goa Government had issued a circular that no sadhus should be permitted to enter their territory.

"Why are they so hard with sadhus?" queried Ramcharandas.

"Sadhus! fine fellows they are!" said the gate-keeper with a spice of sarcasm. "Recently a rich man's house was robbed by a wandering sadhu in Goa and the police are still after him. Hence the order for their exclusion. So you had better retrace your steps as you came."

"Brother, do you think," Ramcharandas asked, "that we belong to that type of sadhus?" and added: "We assure you we mean no ill to anybody."

"Mine is not to judge who is a true and who is a false sadhu. I am here only to obey orders. You cannot pass," he replied firmly.

Ramcharandas utilized to the full all his powers of eloquence and persuasion but in vain. For, he was looking forward most eagerly to a visit to the Kuladevi temple of Goa—the original temple which commanded allegiance from all Saraswats of Southern and Western India. After repeated appeals, the gate-keeper said:

"I can allow you to go in on one condition and it is that you should change your clothes, i.e., give up the coloured ones for plain white, and pass off as ordinary travellers and not as sadhus."

Ramdas was all along watching the scene. Now Ramcharandas turned to him with a questioning look.

"Ram," said Ramdas, "it appears to be God's will that we should not step into the Goa territory. As regards changing the cloth, Ramdas for one, is not for it. He would prefer to go back rather than do anything against the will of God dwelling in his heart. Surely, it is His pleasure that we should turn back."

They left the place and before dark regained the village from which they had started, and spent the night in a small room of a rest-house. Ramcharandas was sorely disappointed. Next morning they went to the bazar, where a kind shop-keeper, a Catholic, suggested that they might travel to the North, via Kadra, to which place they could go by a ferry-boat. The shopkeeper fed them with some biscuits and bread. Then going to the river-side they leapt into a large boat bound for Kadra. A fee of one anna each had to be paid which charge Ramcharandas met from the few annas he owned.

The boat moved on slowly with many a halt on the way because it was carrying also some cargo. However, at dusk they reached Kadra. As night advanced severe cold set in. Having found no room in the local rest-house, they sought shelter on the open varandah of the village headman's office, which stood directly facing the river. A cold breeze had by now begun to blow from the river. Here again the night was spent in a manner similar to the one in the rock chamber on the Ramatirtha hill.

Early at daybreak they started. Now they had to traverse a path along the gradual ascent of a hill through a dense jungle. Some travellers, who carried long sticks with a spear at one end, coming from the opposite direction, warned them against wild bears. When the Lord's Name was on their lips where was fear? As usual Ramdas walked at a brisk pace with Ramcharandas close behind him.

At noon they reached a small village where a halt was made. After bath they ate a few boiled potatoes and, resting for an hour, started again. The jungle extended still further. They now travelled on level ground and legged on. At sunset they reached the village—Coomarwadi. That day from daybreak to sunset they had covered 36 miles—the distance from Kadra to Coomarwadi.

(ii) The Mother Cow

At Coomarwadi they found shelter in a spacious rest-house. Quite a crowd of villagers collected in the house to see the sadhus whose visit to that place was a source of great delight to them. They were extremely kind and hospitable—especially a schoolmaster who arranged for their milk, etc., and also a fire in their room to keep off cold. Stout logs of dry wood were kept burning all through the night. The cold was intense. The same friend procured for them besides milk, boiled roots—kandamool. The edible roots were very delicious. He said that the long tract of forest land from Kadra to Londa railway station, measuring some 70 miles, went by the name Dandakaranya. Sri Ramchandra on his way to Lanka had passed through this land. The place was tapobhumi. The sadhu Satchidanand, whom they passed by beyond Karwar, had attained illumination in the forests close to Coomarwadi.

A small ashram was being built at the back of the village over the samadhi of a saint, from the funds collected by this sadhu. The schoolmaster friend promised to escort them to the holy place the ensuing day.

In the morning, as decided on the previous night, the kind schoolmaster took them to the ashram which lay only a short distance from the village. The ashram was in course of construction. Nearby, there ran a small stream of water in which they had their bath. After finishing their dinner at the schoolmaster's they returned to the dharmashala. This friend also presented Ramcharandas with some money which he accepted. Hundreds of visitors from the village poured on them their pure and simple love.

Next day they proposed to leave the place. Fifteen miles from Coomarwadi lay a village named Supa. Their next halt was fixed to be at Supa. The schoolmaster sent a friend in advance to inform the residents of Supa of their visit. At about five o'clock in the evening they reached Supa. They met hundreds of people on the outskirts of the village waiting to welcome the sadhus. They were duly escorted in procession to a Maruti temple on the bank of the Supa river. In the front room of this temple they were lodged. Arrangements were also made here to burn fuel to keep the room warm. On account of the continuous rush of visitors, Ramdas had to keep awake and sit up day and night. So he confined himself to milk diet only.

The following day was Shivaratri. There was a murti of Shiva in the middle of the river on a raised platform. Access to it was possible only by boat. The Patel or village headman attended to the needs of the sadhus. He took them for the darshan of the murti on the river, and also to the noted temple of Sri Ramchandra. When they returned to their seat in the temple of Maruti, they beheld hundreds of people awaiting their arrival with offerings.

Thereafter commenced a regular flow of visitors. Both for the darshan of the sadhus and celebration of Shivaratri, thousands of people from the neighbouring hamlets had poured into Supa. The visitors continued to come throughout the night. When Ramdas expressed his wish to depart on the following day, the kind-hearted Patel pressed him to stay a day longer, and he yielded. On the last day of their stay, a limping elderly lady followed by her husband came to the temple with a cup of fresh milk. The time was morning. The couple sat beside Ramdas and made him drink the milk. The husband, an overseer's clerk, then told the story of the milk.

He said: "Maharaj, one day, about a year ago, we found at our door a cow which was reduced almost to a skeleton. She was so weak and emaciated from starvation that she was hardly able to walk. She dragged herself along with great effort. Seeing her pitiable condition my wife suggested that we might give her shelter and tend her to which I agreed. The cow appeared to have been disowned and left at large. My wife took her inside the house and got her a place in our bedroom. She fed and nursed her with great care and love. The cow grew stronger day by day. We treated her as one of us. She could freely go about in the house. She was named Krishnabai. Her resting place in our room was kept scrupulously clean.

"Now we were occupying a rented house. Maharaj, we are poor but we know those who are poor and honest are very near to God. So we are happy. It happened that the owner of the house in which we lived came to know that we had given lodging to a cow inside the house. He protested against this and gave us notice that unless the cow was kept in a separate hut we should vacate his house. My wife felt this very much but would not part company with the cow. She could not even bear the idea of a separate shed for her. She appealed to me to look for another house. Kind Providence, without much effort, provided us with another house—the owner of which did not object to our having the cow inside the house.

"From about six months we have been living in the new house. Meanwhile, the cow, as though to reward us for our services, has presented us with a she-calf — to which she gave birth only yesterday. The milk we have brought for you is Krishnabai's first yield. We consider we have offered it to God Himself."

What wealth of love and devotion!

(iii) Love's Triumph

As the day advanced the rush of visitors increased. Presents flowed in, in abundance. The offering of cocoanuts swelled into a big pile. There was quite a shower of grapes, dates and sugarcandy which Ramdas distributed freely amongst the innumerable village children. Ramcharandas heartily joined in this task. Now people thickly thronged the room, the doorway and outside.

At about ten o'clock in the forenoon two Muhammadan policemen came to the temple. They wedged their way through the crowd and, roughly brushing aside the people at the entrance, got into the room occupied by Ramdas and Ramcharandas. Their grisly beard and rolling eyes signified their stern mission. Stamping their boots on the ground they glared at the sadhus. One of them, taking out a note-book and pencil from his pockets spoke in a loud and commanding voice:

"Are these the sadhus? Well, give me your address. Quick, we are in a hurry." Addressing Ramcharandas, "Here, come along—which is your native place?"

Ramcharandas was perplexed and turned to Ramdas for a hint.

"Ram, don't hesitate," said Ramdas, "give your name and tell him that you are a native of Mangalore."

His name and address were duly noted down by the policeman. Now he turned his gaze at Ramdas.

"Your name?" he shouted.

"Ramdas," Ramdas replied.

"Native place?" cried he.

"The whole universe," rejoined Ramdas.

At this reply he stiffened and, working up his eyes into a ferocious state, blurted out:

"Beware, none of your jokes with me. Don't you see who I am? Which is your native place?" he repeated.

"The whole universe," Ramdas replied again.

Ramdas was cool and all smiles. The reiteration thoroughly roused the policeman. Stamping his right foot down with great force he growled:

"None of your fooling with me! If you don't reply sensibly I will have you arrested and put into custody. Do you understand?"

Ramdas answered: "If you are so kind as to take this servant he would thank you indeed. It matters little where he think of God—a prison is as good a place as any other," and with a cheerful smile he added, "O God, Thy lila is wonderful. It is Thou alone who hast come in this form. The mother sometimes, when she wants to subdue the obstinate will of her child, puts on a frightening mask and pretends to be a hobgoblin. So long as the child is unaware of the fact that it is the mother who is behind the mask, it yields to fear, but when it knows that it is the mother who personates the frightful thing, instead of being moved by the sight, it pulls down the mask and reveals to itself her real identity. So it is with Thee. Thou art He—the Beloved of Ramdas. Thou mayest assume any disguise but he can see Thee through it. He is not afraid of Thee. He replies in the words which Thou Thyself hast taught him."

The policeman listened to him patiently. Ramdas was calm and cheerful as ever. A sudden change came upon the policeman. The ferocious look vanished from his eyes giving place to one of resignation. His hot and flushed face resumed its calmness and colour.

"Maharaj," he addressed Ramdas with eyes lowered and hands folded, "a thousand pardons for my folly. Without knowing you I harassed and abused you in strong language. The thing that disarmed me was your face which remained ever smiling, during all the time I was rating and insulting you. I behaved like a brute. Pardon, pardon I seek."

Then silently pocketing his note-book he proposed to depart with his companion. Ramdas then offered them each a piece of cocoanut and some dates as prasad which they received in all humility and left the place. Love triumphed over hate and harshness!

He subsequently learnt the cause of the policeman's rough behaviour. It appeared that two Hindu policemen had been sent before by the Police Station Officer for obtaining the addresses of these sadhus, but at the crowded entrance of the temple some visitors had persuaded them not to annoy the sadhus, assuring them that they were not ordinary sadhus, and so to demand their addresses would be an insult to them. So, being Hindus, these policemen desisted and returned without the information which they had been asked to procure. At this the Station Officer's ire was roused, and he deputed two Muslim policemen to carry out his orders. Hence their overbearing attitude.

The kind Patel presented Ramdas with a long cloak of thick cotton cloth, as a protection against cold.

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CHAPTER VI

ON THE WAY—NARSOBAWADI

(i) Muslim Friends

Next day the sadhus started from Supa. After visiting Castle Rock, via Londa, they came to Belgaum by train. From Belgaum they travelled on foot. They reached the town named Shahapur. Here the skill of Ramcharandas in cookery failed him. He served Ramdas with half-boiled vegetables with which he had a stiff fight before they could be driven down the throat. After a night's halt they proceeded onwards. While passing through this fertile country they came upon sugar-cane fields. The farmers were so kind as to invite these itinerants and offer them the cool drinks of sugar-cane juice and jaggery.

As they journeyed forward they had to traverse vast tracts of hilly land. Here a word has to be said about the condition of their feet. The incessant travel from day to day on hard and rocky ground had worn out their soles so much that there were on them blisters, sores and deep cuts. Unmindful of this Ramdas was walking as usual at a rapid pace, but Ramcharandas grumbled and limped behind him. At noon they reached a town in the heart of an extensive and elevated plateau. For miles around the place there was hardly any human habitation.

On entering the town they procured sadavrat or alms of food-stuffs from the temples of the place. They fixed upon a small room of a rest-house on the road-side for preparing meals. While Ramcharandas was busy cooking, Ramdas, whom he would never allow to help in any way, sat in the open verandah. Presently a Muhammadan merchant came and took his seat on the edge of the verandah facing Ramdas. The Muslim friend broke into a lively talk, in the course of which he drew out many particulars about these wanderers. He was touched at the sight of the worn and lacerated feet of both. Love welled up in his tender heart.

He said: "It is my great wish that you should have your meal prepared out of my food supplies."

He took Ramcharandas to the bazar, and returned with a rupee worth of first-class rice, possessing a natural sweet odour, dal and ghee. When the dinner was getting ready, the friend further said:

"I have a mind to spend on you five rupees. The balance of rupees three and odd shall be utilized for your tickets on the motor bus that runs from here to Kolhapur. The bus starts in an hour's time. Your feet are so bad that I would you should go at least these thirty miles by bus."

God is indeed all love and compassion. The kind Muslim saw them safely seated in the bus and left them.

At five in the evening they reached Kolhapur railway station. On alighting from the bus, Ramdas enquired of the bus driver, who was again a Muslim, as to what was the railway fare from Kolhapur to Sheroi station—the nearest halting place on the way to Narsobawadi. His reply indicated that for each the railway fare would be about a rupee. Now Ramdas made out that Ramcharandas possessed only a rupee and some small change. Of course, Ramdas was prepared to travel on foot if the funds on hand did not permit of travelling by railway. The bus driver was closely watching them. When he discovered that they did not possess sufficient money for two tickets, he slipped into Ramcharandas' hand a rupee saying:

"Now it is all right for both. You may go by train."

Where did this spontaneous flow of help come from? Surely from the heart of a feeling and loving God!

It was quite dark when they reached Sheroi station. Narsobawadi was about nine miles from the railway station. After groping about in the dark for a place of rest they came to a Maruti temple in which they spent the night. Early morning next day they started and reached Narsobawadi before noon.

(ii) Sense of possession — An obstacle

Narsobawadi is one of the most important shrines in Maharashtra. It is situated on the banks of the river Krishna. On the bank on a higher level stands the temple of Dattatreya—the great avadhuta whose life and teachings speak of the loftiest spiritual realisation. He is verily an avatar of God. The sadhus, washing their clothes in the river, bathed in its cool running waters. Next they visited the temple wherein they had the darshan of Dattatreya's image of white marble, dressed and decked with diadem and ornaments. They sat for some time on the outer platform.

It is a custom here that the sadhus and poor devotees usually obtain their food by madhukari, i.e., by collecting doles of cooked food from four or more houses. At midday, along with others, Ramdas and his young companion also started for madhukari. They visited four houses and collected in all eight balls of rice and some dal. They came with the meal to a clean spot under the shade of a large spreading tree. The rice and dal were mixed in an aluminium plate which Ramcharandas carried with him. Often when alone, these sadhus would eat together from the same plate. So they started eating. Scarcely had they taken two or three mouthfuls when a huge kite from above swooped down and carried away in its talons two big lumps of mixed rice from the plate.

"This is very fine!" cried Ramdas. "How kind of the kite to join us in this precious feast!" They went on with the meal and finished it.

A little incident having a peculiar significance of its own deserves to be noted here. When the sadhus were jointly collecting the doles of madhukari from door to door, a critical devotee who was also one of the mendicants remarked:

"Ah! there go the guru and his chela—a funny pair," pointing to Ramdas and Ramcharandas.

Ramdas lost no time in assuring him that they were not guru and chela but they were Ram and His servant—Ramdas being the servant and the other Ram.

Soon after meals the sadhus left Narsobawadi and travelled via Sangli and Miraj towards Pandharpur. Their feet were getting from bad to worse. Still they tramped on breaking journey only for the nights. Thorny trees and bushes are the characteristic features of this part of Maharashtra. The avenue trees on the road-side were full of thorns, bunches of which dropped on the way. In addition to the laceration and swelling of the feet sharp thorns now found their lodging in them. Ramcharandas cried out with pain whenever a thorn pricked him. Every time Ramdas would prescribe only one remedy and that was ceaseless remembrance of God by repetition of His divine Name which meant forgetfulness of the body and its pains. As they walked on Ramdas dilated upon the subject of complete dependence on God.

"Ram, you are carrying a bag containing cooking utensils and provisions. Now for cooking meals you have to go a-begging for fuel, grains, etc. Ours is a life of freedom which should not be hampered by these encumbrances. God feeds birds of the air and beasts of the field. Would He not feed us also who have put ourselves entirely on His hands? Ours is to fill our mind with His remembrance, and have no care for anything else. So Ramdas suggests that the bag be given up and begging for food be also stopped. Then you will know how wonderfully God looks after us."

"What shall we do with the scrip and the things in it?" asked Ramcharandas.

"Wait, God will show the way," replied Ramdas.

Shortly after this talk they reached at noon a small grass hut on the road-side, occupied by a sadhu. Here they halted to slake their thirst from a neighbouring well. The sadhu, owing to an attack of some eye disease, was short of sight. He was very hospitable and kind. He begged that they might stop with him for the midday meal. They agreed. With the help of Ramcharandas the old sadhu prepared meals. It was now discovered that the sadhu had only earthen pots for cooking. The meal being ready the simple and devout sadhu first fed his guests, after actually worshipping them in the orthodox style. Then he dined upon the remnants of the food left by them. After some rest they prepared to start.

Ramdas turned to Ramcharandas and said: "Ram, God has not been slow in creating an opportunity for parting with the bag and utensils. He wills that we should hand over the bag to the sadhu here. The sadhu is in need of metal vessels. So leave the articles with him and also any money you possess."

Ramcharandas is a pure soul. He cheerfully resigned the bag to the sadhu. There yet remained with him a small bag which contained a black deerskin meant for Ramdas' use, which he would not give away, and a brass lota with a cup which he carried in his hand. As for Ramdas, in addition to the cloth with which he covered himself, the long coat presented at Supa lay across his shoulder.

The sun was still hot. They continued their journey. Going over a mile they took shelter for awhile under a neem tree. Ramcharandas released the bag from his shoulder and laid it on the grassy ground. The lota was still in his hand. Ramdas spread the cloak on the ground and sat on it. Now Ramdas went on expatiating on the qualities of self-surrender.

"The sense of possession is a great obstacle to the realisation of God," he started. "The idea of 'I' and 'mine' must disappear entirely before the aspirant can find absolute freedom and peace in union with God. Verily, everything belongs to the Lord who dwells in the hearts of all creatures and things. Attachment to any external object narrows our vision, creates the ego and gives rise to the false notion that we are separate from God, i.e., from the universal life and spirit. So to reach the goal—eternal freedom and bliss—we ought to surrender up the ego, and behold all life and forms as the manifestation of the one underlying and in-dwelling Truth who is universal and eternal."

Ramcharandas listened to what Ramdas said with great concentration, and Ramdas was completely lost in the essential truth of what he was expounding. Then they got up and walked on. When they had travelled about a mile and a half it was discovered that Ramcharandas was not carrying the smaller bag.

"Ram, what became of your other bag?" asked Ramdas.

He looked surprised and retorted: "What became of *your* coat, Swamiji?"

The fact was both had forgotten to take the things from the place where they had rested beneath the tree.

"Wait here, Swamiji," exclaimed Ramcharandas, "it is not a long run from here. I shall return to the spot and fetch the things."

"None of it, Ram," replied Ramdas. "God thought that even those articles were unnecessary for us; so He has freed us from their possession. Then why go in for them again?"

How unerring are the ways of the Lord! It was clear that the Lord wanted them to be all for Himself. His grace descends on His devotees for dispelling the shadow of I-ness—the root of all ignorance, in order that they may realize their perfect union with Him.

(iii) How God Feeds!

The sadhus proceeded until they reached a village where they stopped in the temple of Maruti. Their rule usually was to be satisfied with one meal a day. During the nights, Ramcharandas would take only light eatables when available. Almost every village in Maharashtra—for that matter in India—contains a temple and a rest-house near the temple. During this travel they invariably spent their nights either in a temple or a rest-house. They started on their journey always in the early hours of the morning. At noon, next day, they were approaching a village where they would have to make their midday halt.

"Remember, Ram," hinted Ramdas, "that we are not to beg for our food. Leave the question entirely to the Lord. Let us simply go to a temple and remain in it engaged in the repetition of His Name."

Reaching the village they entered a temple of Vithal and took their seats in the verandah. Time was close upon 12 noon. A visitor to the temple, seeing the sadhus, asked:

"Why are you sitting here idly? It is time for the midday meal. Go to the Brahman locality where you can beg for your meals."

Ramdas did not reply, and Ramcharandas was also silent. The man walked away. Half an hour passed. Ramcharandas exhibited by his looks that he was growing sceptic. About ten minutes later another man came and put them the question.

"Have you had your midday meal?"

Ramdas replied in the negative.

"How do you manage to have one?" was his next query.

"The Lord sees to it," was Ramdas' quiet reply. The words seemed to have gone home.

"The Lord you speak of bids me take you to my house for meals, but there is one difficulty. I belong to the tailor caste. I don't know if you are willing to take food at my hands," he said.

"You are the Lord Himself in the eyes of the sadhus, so there can be no objection," rejoined Ramdas.

"I am coming presently," he said, and disappeared only to return soon with a water vessel and a rope. He took the sadhus to a well, and gave them a bath. Then he led them to his house which was situated a few yards from the temple. They were welcomed by the tailor's wife and children with immense joy and kindness. With great love the family served both with a sumptous meal. They left the house and returning to the temple took rest for some time. Then they started again.

On the way Ramdas queried Ramcharandas:

"Don't you believe, it was God Himself who fed us with such love?"

Ramcharandas was not in a mood to talk and kept silent. The day passed. Another day came. At midday they found themselves in another village. Here again they stopped in the local Vithoba temple. The sun had passed the meridian. Time flew swiftly and it was nearing one o'clock. There was no sign of food. Ramcharandas was getting impatient and restless.

"Swamiji, Vithoba is very slow this time. I am afraid He has forgotten us altogether."

"Give up all thought of food, Ram. Simply remember Him. Let us submit to His will," exhorted Ramdas.

Waiting for some time more—seeing nothing forthcoming—Ramcharandas said that he would prefer to have a nap, and lay himself down. But while hunger was keenly gnawing at his stomach where was sleep for him? He was now and again lifting the cloth from over his eyes and peeping in the direction of the street. Every moment he looked for the coming of food. It might have been two o'clock when Ramcharandas jumped into a sitting posture and cried out:

"Swamiji, Swamiji, after all, Vithoba is coming—behold, there He is in the street running to us!"

Yes, a dark-skinned man was hastening towards the temple. Coming directly to the sadhus he enquired if they had meals (as though he did not know it). On receiving a negative answer, he left them and returned in a few minutes with two plates of food. Placing the plates before the sadhus he urged them to eat. Urging, of course, was unnecessary. They commenced to eat forthwith. Just then, a kirtan party of about ten also entered the temple. They brought with them cymbals, mridang and vina. They sang choice hymns of Tukaram and danced as the meal progressed. What did all this show? God was not satisfied in giving them merely food for the body but had also arranged for a spiritual treat. Such are the gracious ways of the Lord!

CHAPTER VII

PANDHARPUR—SHETPHAL

(i) Dependence on God is Liberation

Eventually they reached Pandharpur, the famous shrine of the deity—Vithoba. This was Ramdas' second visit to Pandharpur. They entered the city when it was quite dark. They wandered in the streets in search of a dharmashala. At last they met an old woman—a simple, pious soul.

"Mother, will you please point out the way to a dharmashala?" Ramdas asked her.

"By all means, mother," she replied. "Follow me, mother, I will lead you to it."

Both the sadhus followed closely at her heels. She went on speaking:

"My mother Rukmini is so great, so merciful. She has assumed all forms. Everywhere I behold her. She is the man, bird, beast, stone, trees, stars, sun, moon. Oh! my mother has become all. How glorious She is! She is ever kind, kind."

This was the vision of the old mother. She saw her divine Mother manifested everywhere. They arrived at the entrance of the temple of Rukmini. Here the old mother prostrated on the floor, facing the main door and lay on the ground in a state of ecstasy for about five minutes. Then rising up she turned to Ramdas, and said:

"Now mother, come along, let us proceed."

After passing through many streets and by-lanes they at last came to a dharmashala in which they settled down for the night. Ramcharandas must have felt very hungry. He said he would go out into the city and get some food to satisfy his hunger. Soon he left and returned after about two hours. Early next morning they directed their steps to the Chandrabhaga river. Here Ramcharandas came out with an unexpected request.

"Swamiji! I want you to initiate me formally into sannyas. I would have my head shaved and clothes dyed in ochre before having ablutions in the sacred river."

Ramdas was taken by surprise at this strange proposition and replied:

"Ram, your proposal is simply astounding. Understand, sannyas is not a thing which another can impose on you or initiate you into. Sannyas does not mean shaving the head and donning orange robes. It signifies a state of internal renunciation of attachment to the transitory objects of the world. Mere change of appearance and dress is hypocrisy, if in mind and heart you have not given yourself over to the Lord. If you feel a real mental recoil from the objects of sense and have an experience of ecstasy in the remembrance of the Lord who dwells in you and everywhere in the world, by all means make any change you like in clothing and appearance, provided you are sure that by such a change you are helped in your spiritual growth, and get fixed in your faith and conviction. Do not forget that the goal is the vision of God. Now your question is to be decided by yourself. Another cannot solve it for you. Ramdas can only lay bare his own experiences before you. He is wearing orange robes because the cloth is reminding him every time he looks at it, that he has consecrated his life in its entirety to the Lord. He belongs to none but Him who is infinite love and bliss. So consult the voice of God within you and act."

Ramcharandas heard in silence and did not thereafter press the point. They finished ablution in the river and sat for a time on the sands.

"Swamiji," suggested Ramcharandas, "we should not leave this place for at least four or five days. The plight of our feet is simply deplorable. They are quite unfit just now for further exertion."

In reply Ramdas had to speak at some length on a subject on which for some time past Ram was inspiring him to enlighten Ramcharandas.

"Don't misunderstand Ramdas. Take it, in the first place, that he is your best well-wisher. You have been exceedingly kind and good to him from the time of your contact with him. You have also suffered a great deal. Ramdas had warned you that to throw your lot with him would prove a painful affair. However, it is well you shared with him the discomforts and trials of the long journey from Mangalore to Pandharpur. Experience is a great teacher. Now you want Ramdas to remain here for some days so that the sores of their feet may be healed, while the voice within him bids him start from here before this very evening, and he has to obey the voice. Ramdas is not dragging you into another course of suffering when it is evident that you are not prepared for it. Moreover, a travel by yourself will do you much good. Independent life will grant you increased faith in God. His constant remembrance will imbue you with a consciousness of strength and security. You will thus grow perfectly fearless in your complete dependence upon Him. Give up your slavish adherence to Ramdas. Roam about by yourself. God dwells within you. Be aware of His fellowship always."

Ramcharandas' attachment and love for Ramdas had reached such a degree that separation from Ramdas meant for him not an ordinary wrench, with the result that Ramdas' advice fell flat on him.

"Swamiji," he remonstrated, "I cannot bear to think of a severance from you. I simply cannot leave you."

His attitude was firm and unyielding. Time passed. Ramdas lapsed into a listless mood. The sun had risen high. Ramcharandas broke the silence.

"Swamiji, shall we go to any one of the annakshetras? It is nearing time."

(ii) Why this Lamentation?

Both moved towards the city. Passing through the streets they came to the noted annakshetra where Ramdas had occasion to dine during his last visit to Pandharpur. The kshetra used to feed with rich meals six sadhus every day. When they reached the place Ramdas found seven sadhus waiting at the entrance of the kshetra. The manager of the house was to select six out of the waiting sadhus. Ramdas felt an inclination to leave the place, as he did not wish to stand in competition with others, in the matter of selection. He had done so on a former occasion at another kshetra of this city. But there was Ramcharandas who would, of course, refuse to take meals without him. However, he stayed.

At the usual time the manager turned up with a note-book to take down the names of the sadhus he would select for dinner. He picked out six sadhus including Ramdas and Ramcharandas. The rest of the sadhus departed except one who appealed to the manager to take him also. The manager told him that he could not do so as the rule was only for feeding six. He also added that he had his chance only the previous day. Ramdas made out that the attraction for the sadhu was the luxurious food served in this particular kshetra. When the sadhu saw that he pleaded in vain, he requested Ramdas to speak for him. Ramdas with folded hands prayed to the manager:

"Ramji, do take him also. In a feeding house an extra man can be accommodated."

With a few sharp words the manager cut short his advocacy as much as to say: "Mind your own business."

The lucky (?) six were asked to enter the house. Ramdas walked in along with others, dazed and depressed. The extra sadhu was left behind. Meals were served for six. The thought of the sadhu outside troubled him. The meal progressed. He could hardly eat anything. It was a dinner of sweet balls and cakes. After finishing the meal he came out and what did he behold? The extra sadhu was still sitting on the door-step. At the sight of him Ramdas felt as though an ice-cold douche of water were suddenly poured over him. His hair stood on end and a deep aching was felt at the heart as if from a stab. Calling Ramcharandas quickly to his side, Ramdas asked him if he had any eatables with him.

"Yes," he replied, "I have about half a seer of fried gram, tied up in my cloth."

"At once hand over the gram to the sadhu and also any money you possess."

He was given the gram and also a few annas, but Ramdas' heartache did not heal.

"Ram, God wills that Ramdas should leave this place immediately," Ramdas said.

He walked away from the spot at a running pace, Ramcharandas at his heels. His heart shook with an uncontrollable emotion. Tears began to flow down his cheeks in a regular stream, and he wept and wept like a child. Ramcharandas looked at him with a questioning glance. Ramdas ran on until he reached the railway lines. Here he slowed down, but the from village to village. He did not care for food nor would he touch any when it was placed before him. He was now feeling a sort of searedness at heart. His feet were swollen due to thorn-pricks and blisters. In this condition, on the third day, he arrived at a village named Shetphal. He went into a temple of Maruti and laid down his tired body on the hard stony floor, and, covering it with his only cloth, rested. The time was midday. He had hardly taken half an hour's rest when he heard the footsteps of somebody entering the temple. He had screened his head with the cloth. The visitor having performed his puja of Maruti for about five minutes approached Ramdas and asked:

"Who is that?"

Ramdas remained silent. Then he pulled off the cloth from Ramdas' face and questioned: "Why are you lying down here like this? Have you eaten anything for the day?"

Ramdas simply replied: "It is the will of Ram that he should not eat," and was covering himself again when the stranger caught Ramdas by the arm and drew him up into the standing posture. He was a tall and strong man. Then he almost dragged Ramdas forcibly with him saying: "Ram's will is that you should take meals in my house. Come along. I will not allow you to starve."

Ramdas had to submit. The kind friend's house consisted of a long narrow room facing the street, the front portion of which was used for a shop of sundries and the back as residence. He led Ramdas directly into the interior where a young girl was busy preparing meals.

"Child," he said to his daughter—such she was, "serve this sadhu first. Cook for him some soft roties, for he is without any teeth."

Spreading a gunny bag on the floor he made Ramdas sit down on it.

He said: "Maharaj, I am a poor petty shop-keeper," and pointing to the girl, "this is my only daughter, I have no wife. The girl is unmarried. So you will have no objection to eat from her hands."

It was evident from his words that there is a certain class of sadhus who are opposed to eating food prepared by married women. However, Ramdas neither belonged to that class nor did he favour the views held by them on this point.

Now the food was ready. The kind shop-keeper mixed in a brass plate two roties with a quantity of dal curry converting the whole into a soft mixture. Then he fed Ramdas with his own hands, just as a mother would feed her child.

"Lord, art Thou making amends for what Thou madest him do in the annakshetra of Pandharpur?" thought Ramdas. What love! What kindness!

Taking leave of the shop-keeper Ramdas rambled on and, after passing many a village, came to Anjangaum. Here in the street a man directed him to the house of the Kulkarni—a village officer.

Ramdas entered an old-fashioned square block of buildings and took his seat on one of the verandahs. He saw two men sleeping on the opposite side, their bodies concealed beneath white sheets. There was none other visible outside on the verandah. The time was about ten o'clock in the morning. As was his wont, he was humming to himself the Ram-mantram. The sound of the divine Name seemed to have roused one of the sleepers from his slumber. Rubbing his eyes he sat up awakening the other also. The latter went inside while the former looked at Ramdas and asked him what he wanted.

"Ram has directed His servant here for bhiksha," Ramdas replied.

These words seemed to have produced an electric effect on the questioner. He invited Ramdas to a seat on the mat. Now Ramdas went on talking in a spontaneous flow about the glories of God and the power of His Name. Soon after, they were joined by the other friend. The first one was the Kulkarni, the master of the house, Madhavrao by name, and the second was his family priest Govind Joshi, a resident of Upalai, a village about three miles from Anjangaum. At the first sight, both of them fell in love with Ramdas. Madhavrao was overflowing with kindness. He drew Ramdas' legs towards him and fell to rubbing the soles.

"The feet are not only worn out and swollen, but also a number of thorns have stuck in," he remarked.

Joshi and Madhavrao worked briskly on Ramdas' soles with two needles, and pulled out all the thorns. The friends observed the deep cuts and also that the skin at places had worn out so much as to reveal the flesh.

Madhavrao procured some ghee and filling the dents with it, also smeared it all over the soles. Then he took Ramdas for a bath. He applied oil all over his body. Ramdas had no bath for several days, and exposure to the heat of the sun during the day and to the cold in the night, and starvation into the bargain, had turned the skin dry, dirty and coarse. With all tenderness Madhavrao washed the body with hot water and soap. While the bath was in progress Ramdas reminded him of Sri Krishna and Sudama. With all love the Lord had tended and nursed the emaciated body of His devotee!

Bath over, he was fed with a simple and wholesome meal. The day and part of the night passed in talks on devotion and lives of the saints. The ensuing day Govind Joshi proposing to take Ramdas to his village, Upalai, left Anjangaum with him, and reached the village before dark.

Govind Joshi was a poor old man. When Ramdas entered his hut, for such it was, he was welcomed by Joshi's wife, as if she was awaiting his arrival. As he sat down she began to massage his legs and talk to him so familiary that she appeared to have known him for years. A simple, childlike, splendid soul she was!

He remained in Upalai for a couple of days. The villagers came to see him in hundreds. Joshi and his wife, who had also a son, treated him with great hospitality. Indeed, hospitality is the pride and glory of Hindu households. He gave the devout couple the names Atrimuni and Anasuya, and their son Datta, and their house Atri ashram.

From Upalai he went to Angar to which place he was invited by Balwantrao, the Kulkarni of the village. Here again he received kindness and love from all alike. With the aid of an escort he next proceeded to Mohol, where he lodged with Janardan Pant, a schoolmaster and a great devotee. He was pure-hearted, and was also a sincere seeker after Truth. Here Ramdas met another schoolmaster, Babooji, a devout soul, who arranged for his journey to Sholapur by motor-bus.

With Babooji he arrived at Sholapur, and put up in the local Panduranga temple. He stopped here for a day and left for Bijapur.

CHAPTER VIII

HUBLI

(i) The Heart of the Mother

Ramdas once again started alone on foot. He walked on and on through fields, meadows and woodlands. About a week's satsang with the village devotees had assuaged his grief brought on by the incident at annakshetra at Pandharpur. The Lord had brought it about in his own mysterious way. He is truly the great healer of our sorrows. As he journeyed on, he came upon an elevated land, covered with a wild growth of shrubs. When he was passing through it a wish to smoke crossed his mind. He smoked tobacco sometimes but did not carry any with him. Where was the possibility of having a smoke in the midst of a jungle, a solitary place far away from the haunts of men? But, for the Lord nothing is impossible.

Suddenly, a man from behind the bushes came on towards him. Looking at him, the first thing Ramdas noticed was a bidi, a country leaf-cigarette, poised on his ear. The man quietly removed the bidi from the place on his ear and offered it to Ramdas. He would not touch Ramdas. He dropped the bidi into his hands. Then, taking out from his pockets two smooth black stones and a bit of cotton wool, and striking the stones one against the other, he produced a spark that set fire to the piece of cotton. He handed the burning cotton to Ramdas on a leaf. Ramdas lit the bidi and began smoking. All this was the work of a few seconds. So far, Ramdas had no talk with him. They walked on the same road, but he maintained a certain distance.

Ramdas broke the silence with the question: "Why do you, brother, shrink away from Ramdas and walk so far apart?"

"O master," he replied, "I am a pariah by caste. How can I go very near you or touch your sacred person?"

No sooner did Ramdas hear this, than he rushed towards the pariah and, throwing his arms round his shoulders, embraced him.

"You are not an untouchable. You are Lord Vithoba Himself. Are you not the same dhed who ran to the rescue of Damaji Pant, the noted saint of Mangalvedha?"

He laughed knowingly and recapitulated the incident.

"Now, master, where are you going?" he asked.

"Don't know where," was Ramdas' reply.

He said: "Two miles from here, there is a tiny village on the banks of the river Bhima. Do proceed to that village. It has only one shop. You go and stand before the shop, and the Lord will attend to all your needs. I can escort you as far as the outskirts of the village. My way lies in a different direction."

Ramdas acquiesced. There was no further talk. He was merged in a blissful abstraction. The village loomed in view. He made straight for it. He was now only about fifty yards from the village-huts when he turned back to look for his strange companion. The so-called pariah had disappeared.

The sun had risen right overhead. As advised by him, Ramdas stopped before the only shop of the village. An unusually stout woman was attending to the customers with the help of a young man. The mother saw Ramdas. Suddenly her maternal heart went out for her child, the lone wanderer. Brushing aside the customers, who had crowded in front of her shop, she beckoned him with both hands to draw near.

"Son, son," she said to the young man by her, "first give this sadhu something to eat."

Soon, in the outstretched cloth of Ramdas rained a pretty large quantity of parched rice, jaggery, dates, etc. The stout mother jumped down from her seat in the shop and called for a blanket. With the blanket she stepped as quickly as her heavy body could permit to the verandah of Mahadev temple on the other side of the road, opposite to her shop. Spreading the blanket on the floor, she invited him to take his seat. He was duly installed on the blanket. She got also a lota of drinking water for him.

The mother squatted opposite to him and tenderly urged him to eat. By this time a number of small boys had gathered round him. He distributed the major portion of the eatables among the children and partaking himself of some of them drank the water.

"Sadhuji," the mother then said, "the river Bhima is near by. Have your ablutions in the river and then return. I shall have meals ready for you. My house is close at hand. I shall either take you home or fetch the meal over here."

He got up and traced his steps to the river where he washed his clothes and had a bath. Returning he found the mother waiting for him.

"Come along, sadhuji," she said, "I am taking you home." He followed her. The sun was very hot and the ground was burning. He had nothing either to cover his head or to protect his feet. About half-way the mother realized the situation. Her soft heart felt the pangs of remorse.

"What a heartless creature I am!" she cried, "I ought not to have taken you out in this hot sun. I could have brought meals for you in the temple. You have no sandals on your feet. The ground is hot like a frying pan. Fool, fool that I am!"

The mother had, of course, leather sandals on her feet.

Hence her remorse was all the more poignant.

"Never mind, mother," he assured her, "your child is accustomed to the heat."

"Come on, let us walk quickly. We have only a short distance to cover," she said.

Her unwieldy body swayed to and fro as she hastened on. They arrived at the door of her cottage, but to her great dismay it was locked, for her daughter-in-law had gone to the neighbouring house closing the doors. She had the key. Her return would surely take some time, and Ramdas meanwhile had no place to stand but in the sun.

The mother called out "Lakshmi! Lakshmi!" Drawing deep breaths she spoke: "What shall I do? You have to stand barefooted on the burning sand!"

She found a way out. She lifted up Ramdas bodily from behind—he was a feather-weight to her—and held him standing on the lower cross-piece of the door-frame, and bawled out for her Lakshmi who at last came running. She could not resist giving a bit of her mind to the daughter-in-law, and a goodly slice it was!

Inside the house, he sat on a plank offered by the mother. At her bidding the girl Lakshmi placed before him a plate of food which consisted of two thick rotis and dal curry. He started eating. He found the roties stiff and unyielding to the fingers. However, he attempted to crush and mix them with the dal. They would not submit to the process. He put some pieces of roti with dal into the mouth and tried to swallow them. Of course, it must be noted that he had at that time hardly three or four teeth in his mouth. So mastication was out of the question. He swallowed the roties piece after piece until a big-sized one got stuck up in the throat. Suffocation ensued. He tried to push down the bit or throw it out by a cough. The mother watched the struggle and light dawned on her.

She exclaimed: "Cursed be my wits! Lakshmi, are you also so blind? The sadhu has no teeth, and you have served him with cold and stiff roties. How can he eat them? Now look! — his throat is choked. Good Lord! Lakshmi, you are perfectly heartless. You have not offered him even water to drink. Quick, quick, give him some water. See, his face has turned red; he is gasping for breath!"

Immediately a tumbler of water was placed in his hands and he drank. The piece of roti was washed down the throat. Now the mother pounced upon the plate of food and, while taking it away, said: "This is going to do you no good." "Lakshmi," she told the girl, "prepare at once fresh roties. Make them soft. Look to it at once."

While Lakshmi was busy the mother milked the-she-buffalo, standing in the square-yard in the centre of the building. In a few minutes she heated the milk. Lakshmi's trained hands made soft roties. The mother crushed two of them in the hot milk in a plate. The softened meal was then placed before him.

"Sadhuji," the mother then appealed, "you must forgive me. I am after all a foolish and useless woman; forgive me. The food is now all right; please do justice to it."

After dinner the mother accompanied him back to the temple, and taking leave of him returned to her home. Such was the heart of the mother. He directly started on his journey and walked until sunset when he reached a way-side village.

(ii) Is there God?

Thus from village to village he travelled on. Again the plight of his feet grew worse due to incessant walking. He was now nearing Bijapur. On leaving a village in the afternoon, he had covered a distance of about three miles. It might be past three o'clock when he met some men coming from the opposite direction. They stopped him and enquired whither he was going. He, of course, told them that he wanted to reach Bijapur. One of them warned him that he would not reach Bijapur before dark, as he had to traverse yet twenty miles, and there was not a single village on the way where he could halt. In darkness he might lose himself and be caught in a jungle. He suggested that Ramdas might start early next morning. Meanwhile he might give them the pleasure of his company for the night.

Ram takes care of His child at every place!

He retraced his steps with these kind friends and spent the night in their village. Early next morning, long before dawn, he started again and covered about ten miles by forenoon. Here he found on his left a big area of cultivated fields. In the middle of the farm was a well from which water was being drawn by pikotah for irrigating the fields. A farmer and four bullocks were at work. Ramdas went to the well to quench his thirst and did so by descending into the well. When he came up the driver of the bullocks beckoned Ramdas to go to him. He made Ramdas sit beside him in the cool shade of a large tree near the brink of the well. Ramdas smoked a few puffs from his chilam of tobacco.

"Now, I have a question to ask you," he said. "Are you sure, sadhuji, that there is a God? For my part I have strong doubts about His existence."

Ramdas replied: "God is there for them who have faith, and not for them who have not."

"Listen then to my tale," he continued, "my occupation as you see is agriculture. I have a family consisting of my wife, three grown-up daughters, a son and his wife. The green fields around this well are of our cultivation. All the members of the family are toiling in the fields from morn till night. These four bullocks also work for long hours for irrigating the fields. We are all actively at our tasks throughout the year. With all this you will be surprised to learn we are not having sufficient to procure bare creature comforts." Pointing to his daughters who had by now assembled near Ramdas, he added with a bitter tone: "Look, maharaj, at the clothing of my girls. They are in rags. You say there is God. If there is one, He must be very cruel; if cruel He is no God."

"For Ramdas," Ramdas replied, "God is not a mere matter of faith or speculation. He is a certainty. In spite of what you say of your condition, Ramdas can assure you that God is, and He is all kindness and love. We are not to judge His existence by the material comforts we obtain in life or by the absence of such comforts. The trials and sufferings we undergo are necessary for our spiritual growth. For the sake of God princes have renounced kingdoms and have taken to the beggar's bowl and rags. Life is misery for him who knows no contentment, however affluent he may be in circumstances. A poor man content in his cottage is far happier than a monarch discontented in his palace. Contentment is a gift of God which we get through faith and submission to Him. God never means us harm. Our want of belief in His benevolence is the source of our misery. You may say yours are hard facts that sternly face you. They are nothing when you assign them the right value, and thus understand the true purpose of life. Verily, God is not for him who frets and fumes. Brother, do not give way to despair. Submit to His will and all will be well."

He heard Ramdas in silence while his eyes were filled with tears. Ramdas left him and proceeded on his journey.

Ramdas' mind set to work: whence is the misery of the agriculturist? No doubt, one suffers by one's own actions or karma. How did karma in this case work through external causes? The middleman and the moneylender were certainly the ostensible causes of the poor man's ruin. The heartless exploitation by the tradesman on the one hand and the greediness of the money-lender on the other must have crushed him down. The ceremonies and festivals over which large sums of money are wasted, should have driven him into the clutches of the latter. Added to these, there are the caprices of the weather and seasons and, to top it all, heavy taxation.

At midday he arrived at a village where, under a grove of trees, there was a tank in which he had his bath, and then his bhiksha in the neighbouring village. Resting for an hour in the cool shade of the grove he continued his journey. Bijapur now lay only at a distance of six miles which he made up by five o'clock in the evening.

He went to the house of Shankarlal Oza, the kind merchant friend whose hospitable roof had sheltered him, when he had visited Bijapur on the previous occasion. At his pressure Ramdas stayed with him for two days. He and his ailing wife proved by their kind attention that they were the very embodiments of love. Shankarlal noticed the condition of Ramdas' feet. They were so much swollen that they appeared to be stricken with elephantiasis. He spoke with great concern about this matter in the presence of his friends who, touched by his reference, raised a contribution for his railway fare to Hubli. Ramdas had told him that he was to go to Hubli.

(iii) You are in the upper storey, eh!

On the third day he left by the evening train. After purchasing the ticket Shankarlal found a balance of eight annas left from the amount subscribed by the friends. He urged

Ramdas to accept the money and, in spite of his protest, he slipped it into the pocket of a long coat Ramdas was then wearing, as also the ticket.

Night passed, the day dawned. The eight-anna change was jingling in his pocket. He did not know what to do with it. Till then he was not in the habit of carrying money, because he needed none. The Lord looked after him in all matters without giving him occasion to handle moneys. When the train stopped at a station, a blind beggar got into the compartment. Here was the way out of the situation, thought Ramdas, and handed the beggar a two-anna bit, reserving the balance for any beggars who might come along at subsequent stations. Station after station passed and yet no sight of a beggar.

At about ten o'clock the train steamed into the Hubli station. Alighting, Ramdas came to the road. What to do with the money? The question was insistently forcing itself on his mind. Ram bid him go straight to Ubhayakar's house, and in the afternoon to Sri Siddharudh math. He walked as far as the gate of Ubhayakar's house but no, he could not enter the gate with money in his pocket. He wanted to dispose of it but there was no way. However, he turned and retraced his steps towards the station, and half-way stopped on the road. "O! what to do with the money?" No beggar was anywhere visible. He thought of flinging the coins into the ditch on the side of the road but again no, Ram wanted him to hand over the money to somebody. Where was that somebody. What a problem! O Lord!

The matter may have only an ordinary significance for the reader, but for Ramdas it was a momentous and crucial question. Once again he wended his way to Ubhayakar's. When he was nearing the house he discovered a sweeper, just emerging from the compound of the municipal office: "Here is

Ram, come to the rescue," muttered Ramdas. Ramdas passed the loose coins to him which he accepted with great joy. A weight seemed to have been lifted off his heart. Now he entered Ubhayakar's house.

Subbarao Ubhayakar—a saintly soul—gave him a glad welcome. All the members of his household were overflowing in their kindness to him. The old saint showed him the Krishna temple, built through his effort and initiative. The murti of Sri Krishna—of marble, pure and white as snow—is a charming figure, indeed a beautiful work of art.

Returning home the saint asked Ramdas: "Where do you wish to go next from Hubli?"

"Bangalore," was the reply.

"Well, our people are leaving the day after tomorrow for Bangalore. You may accompany them," he suggested. Ramdas agreed.

In the afternoon he visited the famous math of Sri Siddharudh Swami. This was his second visit to the math. Sri Siddharudh was the same great personality that drew thousands to his feet. Ramarao—son of Shivarao Chandragiri who has since assumed sannyas, attended on Ramdas with all love, a noble son of worthy parents.

Ramdas stayed at the math for two days. In the nights he took shelter in the verandah of the samadhi temple. On the second night, a little after dark, a devotee of the math came to him.

"Would you like to have something to eat?" he asked.

Now Ramdas was in no mood to eat, nor was he in the realms of duality.

"To whom are you putting the question?" was Ramdas' counter-stroke.

"To you, of course," he replied pointing his finger at Ramdas.

"Is there such a thing as you and I when all is one?" Ramdas rejoined. "Is not all that is visible like the snake in the rope, like the son of a barren woman, like the horns of a hare, like a flower. ......"

"You are in the upper storey, eh!" he remarked as he took to his heels and disappeared from view.

Next day Ramdas returned to Ubhayakar's house and left Hubli by the midday train in the company of the ladies of the house. These mothers looked after him very tenderly on the way. They reached Bangalore early morning the following day.

CHAPTER IX

AGASTYASHRAM—MANGALORE—ERNAKULAM

(i) Ten days' Fast

With Ramdas the kind mother motored to their house, a fine little bungalow. He remained for half an hour in the house. Ram bid him slip away from the place. He rapidly legged it towards Malleshwaram. His idea was to go to Bhavanishankarrao whom he had occasion to meet at Kundapur, the previous year. Ramdas reached Malleshwaram, an extension of the Bangalore City, studded with hundreds of newly built, neat houses. Now which was Bhavanishankarrao's house? He had never visited the place before. Ram must guide him, and He did.

After passing through a network of side-streets he came unconsciously to the very street in which Bhavanishankarrao lived. Again a few yards from his house on the road, he met Bhavanishankarrao's father who guided him to the house. Bhavanishankarrao and other inmates of the house hailed him with unfeigned joy.

Here he met again Sitabai—now the widowed wife of the late Dr. Umanathrao at Kundapur. Over a year ago Umanathrao had shuffled off his mortal coil. Sitabai's devotion and renunciation were remarkable. In the house there was regular devotional music in the evenings, and reading of Ramayan in the afternoons. Bhavanishankarrao and his sister Sitabai took prominent part in them. Now Ramdas' diet had changed to milk and fruit. He stopped with these kind and devout people for four days. He felt a distinct call from Kirimanjeshwar, beyond Kundapur, which also goes by the name of Agastyamuni Ashram.

On the fifth day by the night train, Ramdas started from Bangalore and arrived at Kasaragod the next evening. Here he availed himself of the darshan of his Gurudev and other devotees of the place. Stopping here only for a day he proceeded to Mangalore. His goal was Kirimanjeshwar and he must reach it at the earliest possible time. He had come to know that he was to undergo at that place a long fast. After passing through Mangalore where he paid a flying visit to mother Rukmabai, he proceeded straight to Udipi and thence hurried on to Kundapur. Here he was put up at Ram Bhatji's dispensary. The following day he crossed the ferry and reached Kirimanjeshwar.

Directly on arrival at Kirimanjeshwar, he had a dip in the tank opposite the temple. Drinking some water he rambled till evening in the extensive woods, in the midst of which he discovered a tiny temple of a goddess. The temple consisted of an inner, dark, narrow chamber where a stone image of the Devi was installed, an airy and neat front room, with a smooth and shining floor, and outer verandah. For ingress there was only one low door. He decided to occupy the front room of the temple. His possessions were only one coverlet and two kaupins.

His mode of life here was something like this: three baths—morning, noon and evening in the tank, and water drink also at the same time from it. The tank lay about fifty yards from the Devi's temple. Nights were spent in the front room of the temple and days in the woods. The inner shrine was lit for some hours in the night with an earthen cocoanut oil lamp. Every evening a mother of the neighbourhood would attend to this. She must have been lighting the wick at an earlier hour in the evening, for he saw the light on return to the temple after dark. One day she happened to be late and he was already in the front room. She came as usual and entered, but at the sight of the figure of Ramdas, dimly visible in the darkness of the room, she cried out with raised hands in terror and ran away frightened. Thereafter, she stopped away entirely and the lamp remained unlit.

Sometimes of an evening Ramdas would take a walk to the seashore. He found there a huge rock jutting out into the sea. Getting a perch upon it he would watch the giant waves lashing against the sides of the rocks. The sea-crabs would be playing about him and white seagulls flew overhead. The long belt of sand glistened in the sun. At the close of the day he would meet with a most imposing sight when the sun was setting. The gradual descent of the flaming orb into the bosom of the blue sea charmed his sight. Here despite the loud roar of the waves, he experienced a calmness that passes expression.

Day after day went by in silence, water-fast and baths in the tank. Some villagers hearing of his fast attempted to break it by making him drink milk and eat fruits. But he was indifferent alike to the offerings and the offerers. One day, in his aimless rambles, he approached the bazaar where most of the shops were owned by Muslims.

"Who is that man?" a passer-by enquired of a merchant pointing at Ramdas. The merchant replied, his forefinger touching his temples, "He is a half crack."

Ramdas heard the remark and going up to them corrected the merchant's words: "No, brother, not merely a half crack: why not say a full crack which is the truth?"

He was taken aback at this sudden and strange confession. Ramdas passed on.

Now, what was the effect of the fast on Ramdas? After the third day he began to feel physical weakness. Again three days more; his power of locomotion diminished considerably. He could not walk to the tank at a stretch. He had to sit down at several stages on the way. There was also a marked emaciation of the body. Eight days later, he could only crawl on all fours for his bath and drink. He used to lie flat on his back on the smooth floor of the room. While trying to rise he would feel as though the back was glued to the floor. He was awake all the night and day. There was no sleep for him. Except extreme physical weakness he had no pains in the body. The mind was filled with perfect peace. Remembrance of God had become a settled and continuous function of the mind. When sitting quiet or lying down, he was often totally unconscious of the body.

On the ninth day the village munsif of the place, a Saraswat, visited him at the Devi's temple with presents of milk and plantains. Ramdas gave him to understand that he had no command from God to eat. He had no idea as to when the fast would be broken. However, he assured the friend that when he did so he would first take food in his house. The day for it was not far off. The fast ended two days later. Ramdas trudged on to his house which was over a mile from the temple. He had to take long rests on the way.

The kind friend, so also his faithful wife, considered it a happy privilege to feed Ramdas. After the meal, taking permission of the kind host, he left for Kundapur in a motor-bus, the friend having secured for him a seat in it. He reached Kundapur by evening.

(ii) Well-baked Brick!

In Kundapur, Ramdas as usual occupied the upstairs of Ram Bhatji's dispensary. The medical friend treated him with utmost regard and love. He preferred to live on milk diet. Here he met Ramcharan, a well-educated Northern India sannyasi, who was taking keen interest in the social amelioration of the masses. The sannyasi conceived an unusual affection for Ramdas and got attached to his person.

Ramdas' stay in Kundapur was during the mango season. The friends who visited him gorged him, as it were, with mangoes of the season. He was also made to drink large quantities of milk. The result was, he got an attack of diarrhoea accompanied by fever. The fever completely took hold of him. His body had already weakened owing to the ten days' fast. Instead of feeling discomfort, during the fever, he passed through an experience of indescribable ecstasy. Even when the fever was at its heights, he danced through sheer joy.

Ram Bhatji growing anxious proposed to treat him with medicine. Ramdas did not like that the fever should be driven out in that manner. He had accepted the fever as a welcome guest, and in its company he was having a blissful time."Why should you," Ramdas replied, "think of ejecting it? Let it take leave of Ramdas at its own sweet will." Ramdas would have nothing to do with his medicine. The fever raged on for two days. On the night of the second day he expressed to Ram Bhatji his desire to leave Kundapur on the next day.

"No, Ramdas," he remonstrated: "I cannot allow you to start until the fever has abated."

Meanwhile Ramdas had received an invitation from Sanjivrao of Ernakulam asking him to go over to him at once. He tried to persuade Ram Bhatji to yield to his plan but he was adamant.

"Well, can you permit him to start in case Ram frees him from fever by tomorrow morning?" Ramdas tempted him.

Ram Bhatji snapped. "By all means," he replied at once.

He felt Ramdas' pulse; the temperature was at its height. He left him and went down. His anxiety drove him up again at about four in the morning to see how Ramdas fared. The friend examined him only to find that the fever had entirely left him. His thermometer indicated normal temperature. He was glad but was also surprised and puzzled, and at last submitted: "God's ways are wonderful!"

"You have to keep your word, Ram," Ramdas said. "You should arrange to send him off by the earliest motor-bus to Mangalore."

"All right," he said lowly.

At 8 a.m. Ramdas was sitting in the bus running towards Mangalore. The sannyasi, Ramcharan, accompanied him. He passed Udipi and reached Mangalore in the evening. They stopped at Sitaramrao's for a couple of days.

During this time Ramdas and Ramcharan had an invitation for dinner at the house of M. Ramarao, father of mother Rukmabai, who was then living with him. Ramcharan was unaware of the old relationship. They went and were treated with loving hospitality both by the mother and her father. When departing the mother asked when she would have the next occasion to see Ramdas. He simply replied, "Ram's will." At this her eyes were filled with tears. All the time Ramcharan was observing the scene, and a member of the house meanwhile apprised him of Ramdas' relationship with the mother, in his former life. Ramdas and Ramcharan left the house and while on the road, Ramcharan, shooting a curious look at him, remarked in a humorous vein: "You are not an ordinary sadhu. You are a well-baked and hardened brick."

What he meant by the observation was significant!

The stay in Mangalore being over he caught the mail train to Ernakulam.

(iii) All Credit is to the Lord

Sanjivrao, a brother of Ramdas by past life, was at the station to receive him.. He was lodged in a small room in Sanjivarao's house. His diet consisted of milk and fruit. He stopped in Ernakulam for about two months.

Here he got through Sanjivrao books from the public library, and became a voracious reader. He perused over fifty volumes of religious literature. Amongst them he read the bulky volumes of Max Muller's translations of the Upanishads, Bhashya of Shankaracharya, etc. Every day some prominent vakils and officers paid him visits. The outstanding event of his stay at this place was the feeding of the poor. It came about in the following way.

One day, when the friends had, as usual, gathered in his room, he threw a suggestion that they might join together in providing the poor people with a meal. They instantly took up the idea and raised amongst themselves the necessary funds to feed about a thousand people. Amongst the contributors special mention has to be made of a generous soul, who wishes to remain unknown, who bore the major share in this charitable service. He is so simple and unassuming that he performs all acts of benevolence without anybody's knowledge. Truly he has been able to realize the saying: "The left hand does not know what the right hand gives."

The ensuing Sunday was fixed for the function. V. Iyer, a Vakil, undertook to manage the affair. It was monsoon time and the rainfall was heavy and continuous. The compound of the local Registrar's office was decided upon as the place for cooking and distribution of food. By beat of tom-tom the public were informed of the approaching event. By Saturday night all things were got ready and the preparation of meals commenced. The meal was to be a plain one. The sky was dark with heavy clouds and rain was pouring in torrents. In the night V. Iyer came to Ramdas and complained:

"Swami, there is no sign of abatement of the rain. If it continues tomorrow also the feeding would be impossible."

When a thousand had to be fed, of course, it could not be done except in the open air.

"Don't be anxious, Ram. Leave the matter to God," Ramdas assured him.

The preparations were ready by daybreak but the heavy rain continued. In the early morning V. Iyer again visited Ramdas—this time with a look of despondency.

"What shall we do?" he exclaimed.

"We do nothing," remarked Ramdas. "The Lord does everything. It was through His will that we arranged the whole matter. It is for Him to see that it is carried out successfully."

The hour had been proclaimed as eleven o'clock in the morning. Nine o'clock struck. It was raining as heavily as ever. Half past nine, quarter to ten and the rains still persisted. Now a strange thing happened. The clouds slowly dispersed. The rain stopped and the sun shone out. Within half an hour in the cloudless sky appeared the bright sun as though he belonged to summer. Exactly at eleven o'clock the food distribution commenced. Ramdas was escorted to the spot to witness the function. The sight of the vast crowd, inside and outside the compound and on the road, thrilled his heart. The feeding went on uninterrupted by noise or confusion. The almighty Lord ate through thousands of mouths.

One of the friends counted the number of people fed and found them to be nearly three thousand. Food intended for a thousand sufficed for thrice the number. Having eaten their fill many people had also carried the food to their homes.

If there is one country in the world, where beggary and starvation have taken hold of vast masses of the population, it is India. The remedy lies in the eradication of ignorance and selfishness from the minds and hearts of the exploiters, within and without. The case of the exploiter is in fact harder than that of the exploited. For, he sows a karma which will bring dire retribution on himself. An inner realisation of equality, based upon a purified vision and awakening of the spirit of sacrifice through love and compassion, can alone bring peace, harmony and happiness into the world.

All classes of the needy and poor were fed including the so-called untouchables. By three o'clock the serving of meals ended; all were satisfied to the last man. When the compound was free from crowds, quite an army of crows descended to the ground and cleared off the scattered remnants of rice. Indeed, in the economy of nature, crows play the part of scavengers. So the compound was, as it were, swept clean. The wondrous thing was that at four o'clock the clouds gathered again in the sky, and it began to rain in right earnest. Ramdas returned to his room. The feeding of over three thousand poor people, from food prepared for one-third of the number, and the cessation of the rain for six hours, during the time of food distribution, were really glorious works of God.

He recollects that some people who witnessed and took part in the function lauded Ramdas for its success. He unceremoniously stopped them with the remark:

"All the credit is only to the Lord. Don't make much of the servant for what the Master has done."

CHAPTER X

KALADY—KASARAGOD—IN THE STEAMBOAT

(i) Birth-place of Sri Shankaracharya

One evening Ramdas was unusually inebriated with ecstasy. In the presence of some friends, of whom V. Iyer was one, he talked with great fervour on the universal aspect of God. Iyer was eagerly listening.

"The whole universe is permeated through and through with God," said Ramdas. "The visible and invisible worlds are all He — as manifest and unmanifest. There is nothing and none but He. All, all is He. Such is the truth. Where then is the idea of 'I' and 'you'—'mine' and 'yours.' All are He and His."

In this strain Ramdas spoke on. The words flowed out of him in an irresistible stream. Ramdas saw that a blissful light had filled the room and the people sitting in it were like faint shadows. The compelling words and the atmosphere produced a marvellous effect on Iyer. His face was aglow with a strange lustre; his eyes became moist.

"I have, then, no relations and no home—where shall I go to?" he cried out with a touch of deep pathos and anxiety. He trembled and swayed on one side. The other friends at once held him and led him out of the room and made him lie down on a bench. He fell into a trance-like sleep for half an hour, after which he returned to outer consciousness. Now, coming to Ramdas, he said:

"Swami, I am going home."

"So you have recovered the ego which you had lost for a while," Ramdas observed with a smile. He nodded in the affirmative and left.

Sanjivarao and the other friends proposed to take Ramdas on a visit to Kalady—the birth-place of the renowned Shankaracharya—situated at a place, a few stations from Ernakulam. A party of about a dozen people consisting of the friends and their families started. They reached the small village in due time. They directed their steps to a garden on the bank of the Alwaye river where stood two temples—one of Sharada and the other of Mahadev. In front of the temples there was a raised plastered pedestal—rectangular in shape—signifying the spot where the remains of Shankaracharya's mother had been interred.

The surrounding scenery was most fascinating. It possessed all the beauty, simplicity and calmness of the countryside. Around the shrine, groves of jack-fruit and mango displaying exuberant verdure, and the tall cocoanut trees shooting up from their midst to a great height and nodding their crested tops in the breeze, yielded shade and coolness, and cast a bewitching spell on that sacred spot.

An aged brahman—an old resident of the place—recounted to the party the ancient episodes and legends relating to the place, and also told them of the visits of eminent personages to the shrine. He said that he had the unique privilege of serving Swami Vivekananda when he came to Kalady, during his itinerant life.

The well-known incident in Shankaracharya's life which determined his adoption of sannyas, when he was still a boy, took place on the bank of the river Alwaye. The boy Shankara was insisting upon his mother to permit him to live a life of utter dedication to God, instead of the ordinary life of a householder, immersed in the worldly cares and desires. The mother would not agree.

One day, when the mother had taken the boy as usual for a bath in the Alwaye river and he was knee-deep in water, a crocodile suddenly caught his leg and began to drag him away into the deep waters.

"Mother, mother," he called out, "a crocodile has caught hold of my leg and is dragging me down into the depths of the stream. I will presently sink and be devoured by it. There is only one way to save me and that is, if you would consent to my adoption of sannyas, the crocodile will set me free."

The situation alarmed the fond mother. In an instant she saw she would rather prefer her only son alive, though a sannyasi, than he be a prey to death in the guise of the crocodile.

"All right, my son—I agree," she answered desperately.

The crocodile disappeared leaving the boy to come up free and safe. The mother kept her word and Shankara became one of the greatest philosophers the world had ever produced.

The party had their ablutions in the sacred river and, after darshan of the deities in the temples, returned to their rooms in the dharmashala where dinner was cooked by the members to the accompaniment of devotional songs. Altogether, it proved to be a most blissful trip. By evening the party reached back Ernakulam.

During his stay at Sanjivrao's, he and his wife and children treated Ramdas with all love and kindness.

(ii) Untouchability—a tar stain

Ramdas now felt a call from Kasaragod and wrote to Anandrao about it requesting him, at the same time, to arrange for an abode in a solitary place for his stay. In due course he arrived at Kasaragod and was put up in a thatched hut on the Pilikunji Hill.

Here he lived on goat's milk and plantains. The raja yogi again came to him and together they danced in the nights to the chant of Ram-mantram. Later on, a new sannyasi from Buntwal also joined them. In the evenings, with other friends from the town, he would also dance in ecstasy to the music of God's Name in the front-yard of the hut.

Ram willed that a dinner should also be given to the poor of Kasaragod. In this instance Ramdas worked actively for collection of funds. He visited the most prominent men of Kasaragod for contributions and also accepted small sums from the poorer classes. On request Anandrao managed the affair. The hillock of Ramgiri was selected for the feeding, and a Saturday was fixed for the purpose.

Due preparations were made, and by midday nearly a thousand people assembled at the appointed place. The principal classes represented were cobblers, pariahs and fishermen. Although these classes were looked upon as untouchables by the higher castes, even as among themselves they had distinctions. They sat down for meals in three different lines. The meals were served. Ramdas felt that he should also join them in the dinner. So he took his seat in the line of the pariahs. The raja yogi and the new sannyasi, seating themselves in front of Ramdas, ate with him from the common leaf. Whilst eating thus the precious gift of the gods, he experienced inexpressible joy.

For Ramdas there was no distinction of any kind. The idea of superiority and inferiority on any ground is born of utter ignorance. Wars, strife and misery in the world are all there because of these inequalities. While the inner spirit of all life and manifestations is one, where is room for caste, class, creed, race and colour distinctions? The darkest blot on the purity and beauty of the universal life is "untouchability." It is like a tar stain on a white canvas. Harmony, peace and freedom can be attained only by the realisation of the inner unity of all life, and equality in all its outer expression.

Ramdas' Gurudev who lived with his son Anandrao, one day came to the hut on the hill with great difficulty. The infirmities of age had told upon his otherwise strong constitution. He brought with him a tender cocoanut and some sweet home-made bread. Ramdas was continuing to live merely on milk and fruit. Gurudev insisted on his eating the bread. Ramdas begged of him to be excused. Being touched, and tears welling up in his eyes, Gurudev urged him again to eat the bread, but he was firm and would not have it. He however drank the water of the tender cocoanut. Soon after, Gurudev returned home. During this incident there were in the hut about half a dozen visitors. Now one of them, affected by the disappointment felt by Gurudev, said with a touch of reproach in his voice:

"You say he is your Gurudev and still you refused to eat the bread offered by him with such love; how do you explain this?"

"It is He within and without," Ramdas replied with a smile, "from without He says, 'Eat'; from within He again says, 'Don't eat.' Ramdas always obeys the voice within."

"Why should He speak externally in a manner different from your inner prompting?" interrogated the friend again.

"*That* is His wonderful lila," Ramdas answered.

The friend did not press the matter further.

One day Ramcharandas came suddenly, as if he dropped from the clouds. He carried with him a well-tanned tiger-skin and a yogadanda. He said that, after wandering over some parts of Northern India, he felt a keen longing to see Ramdas again; so he was here.

"Swamiji, I have brought this tiger-skin for you all the way from Jhansi where a devotee presented it to me. Pray accept it," said Ramcharandas.

"Ramdas does not need it, Ram," replied Ramdas, "since he goes about with only one cloth. You may keep it for yourself."

"It is intended for you and you must have it," he urged. "I shall carry it for you. I shall follow you wherever you go. I am not going to leave you this time," he added with emphasis.

"What is that wooden cross for?" asked Ramdas.

"It is for dhyan. It is a great help for sitting erect during meditation," he explained.

"As you are young and energetic, you should not depend upon this contrivance. It is an unnecessary encumbrance. Give it up," Ramdas suggested.

But Ramcharandas argued at great length in favour of it and showed his aversion to renounce it. However, he sought to stick to Ramdas again. At this time, Gurudev fell seriously ill and, at the juncture, Ramdas received a letter from Madhavrao of Anjangaum, inviting him to attend a religious festival to be shortly performed in his house. It was a nine days' festival. The letter was soon followed by a telegram, stating that the presence of Ramdas at the function was indispensable. He felt the urge from within but hesitated owing to the serious nature of Gurudev's illness. Now he placed the matter before Gurudev himself, begging him to decide.

"Would you leave your Gurudev in this condition?" he questioned.

Ramdas could no longer resist. He abandoned the idea of responding to the call from Anjangaum. Madhavrao was informed accordingly by wire. In reply he again telegraphed that Ramdas should not fail him. This time he left the question entirely to Ram, remained calm and waited. Ram has always His own ways!

The following day, when he went to see Gurudev, he found him not only feeling much better but also strong enough to move about. Ramdas asked him if he would approve of his leaving for Sholapur District. He willingly gave his consent.

Lord! Thy ways are indeed mysterious!

(iii) Goa Policeman—smitten

Before starting Ramdas made Ramcharandas understand that no purpose would be served by his accompanying him. But he was as stubborn as ever.

Ramdas reached Mangalore in the evening, of course, followed by Ramcharandas. It was decided to start by the steamboat leaving Mangalore the next day for Bombay. From Kasaragod arrangement had already been made for Ramdas' boat ticket. He advised Ramcharandas to stay on the Kadri hill and devote his time to meditation and communion with God. But Ramcharandas would not submit to the advice. He left Ramdas in the night with the object of collecting the amount necessary for his boat-fare. At Sitaramrao's where he had halted Ramdas' aunt by the former life, coming to know the situation regarding Ramcharandas, paid twenty rupees for his boat-fare. She pressed this amount on Ramdas, asking him to hand it over to Ramcharandas who, she fully believed, would meet him at Mangalore Port. The mother was a kind, pure and noble soul.

Next day, he looked for Ramcharandas at the harbour but could not find him. He got into a steam-launch and crossing the river reached the boat, and went aboard. What was the first thing that met his gaze as he stepped on to the deck? Our ubiquitous friend Ramcharandas was quietly sitting in a corner on a bench with his tell-tale tiger-skin. Ramdas went and sat beside him. The yogadanda had disappeared.

"Swamiji, I came by an earlier launch," he said smiling.

Ramdas then handed to him the money presented by the kind mother.

The boat sailed and reached the port of Marmagoa the next morning. There was a halt of about two hours at this port. Meanwhile, some Goa policemen entered the ship for inspection. One of these, while passing through the deck, cast a casual glance at Ramdas. Ramdas was a deck or third-class passenger on the boat. The sight of Ramdas seemed to have produced an extraordinary effect on him. He stopped and, leaning against the railing opposite Ramdas, began to gaze intently on him. The policeman could hardly take his eyes off Ramdas who was also watching his strange behaviour. About half an hour later he came to Ramdas.

"Follow me, both of you," he said.

They obeyed. He escorted them directly to a Hindu restaurant in the harbour, ordered tea and eatables for both, while he sat on the bench in front observing them. He paid the charges of the tiffin and they followed him back to the deck. Except for the first few words that he spoke, he was perfectly reticent. Thereafter, again until the steamer whistle sounded announcing departure from the port, the policeman was quietly looking at Ramdas from his position by the railing. He was somewhat disturbed when he had to leave the boat. With many a backward glance he finally jumped down on the dock. The Steamboat left the port.

Intimation had been sent from Mangalore about the date of Ramdas' arrival in Bombay. In Bombay he found himself in the blessed home of Sanjivrao—blessed because both Sanjivrao and his wife were embodiments of love. They simply deluged him in their over-flowing love. Many neighbours in the chawl and others from outside came to see him and engaged him in talks on the greatness of God and His Name. Evenings were spent in devotional music. Throughout his stay at Sanjivrao's he enjoyed pure ecstasy.

Time to leave Bombay at last came. He started with Ramcharandas by the night train and reached Angar station in the afternoon next day. At the station he was greeted and embraced with exceeding joy by Govind Joshi who was waiting with milk for him. After partaking of the milk they proceeded on foot to Anjangaum. Before sunset they reached the outskirts of the village where in advance hundreds of the village people were eagerly looking forward to his arrival. He was taken in procession to the house of Madhavrao who welcomed him with rapturous delight.

CHAPTER XI

ANJANGAUM—ANGAR

(i) An Honest Rebel

Ramdas had a unique experience during the visit to the Sholapur District. The reader may remember that Ramdas had visited Anjangaum once before a year previously and had been the recipient of great kindness and hospitality at the hands of the devotee, Madhavrao Kulkarni. The celebration in his house was of Navavidha bhakti, that is, nine kinds of devotion. The devotee who is a high-class brahman had engaged the services of over a dozen brahmans to perform the various functions of the sacred festival. Besides Ramcharandas, Ramdas was later joined by Bhavanishankerrao of Bangalore.

Ramdas arrived at Madhavrao's house only two or three days before the close of the festival which had a run, as usual, for nine days. Since his arrival, Madhavrao's house had a rush of visitors to see Ramdas. Now the attention of most of the inmates of the house and the people of the village was diverted from the religious ceremony towards him. The brahmans did not at all like the turn of events. They remonstrated with Madhavrao against the undue promience paid to a wandering sadhu. Poor Madhavrao was in a sore fix! His love and regard for Ramdas would not diminish in spite of the repeated onslaughts of the brahmans against his fidelity to Ramdas.

The inevitable last straw was not lacking in the present case. The situation was growing every moment more and more tense. At the request of Madhavrao and other guests, Ramdas was made to distribute prasad. The brahmans demurred to accept it from the hands of Ramdas. However, some of them most reluctantly received it from him, and there was an honest rebel. His name was also Ramdas, hereafter referred to as 'brahman Ramdas.' He stood up and defiantly spoke out:

"I refuse to debase myself by taking prasad from his hands," pointing towards Ramdas.

This outburst stunned Madhavrao and the whole congregation, as though a bomb had suddenly exploded in their midst. Ramdas only smiled and told Madhavrao not to mind the brahman's words and there was no harm done. The other brahmans, discovering in brahman Ramdas an intrepid leader, thenceforth gathered round him and raised a united standard of revolt.

Madhavrao was thoroughly frightened. He feared that the celebration which went on so far smoothly would be upset. He understood Ramdas perfectly. He took care to see that Ramdas was not brought into contact with them, so that there might be no room for discontent or disruption. While previously at dinner Ramdas and the brahmans were sitting in one line, Madhavrao now divided up the ranks and so arranged matters that no invidious distinctions were palpably noticed. However, the celebration terminated without further unpleasantness, although the brahmans maintained the tenseness of the situation to the end. Ramdas was all the time an amused witness of the whole game. The matter, however, did not stop here.

Ramdas had meanwhile received an invitation from a neighbouring village. The brahman Ramdas who came to know of it proceeded to the village in advance and warned the devotee, who would have Ramdas at his place, not to take him there. He told the devotee and others that Ramdas was an impostor in the gatb of a sadhu and, for all that they knew he might be an outcast and was not therefore worthy of being associated with by brahmans of their status. Fine things about Ramdas indeed!

But the devotee Balwantrao of Angar—Angar being the name of the neighbouring village—would not be prejudiced. He had on the last occasion come in touch with Ramdas and had been all kindness and love. He ran down to Anjangaum and took over Ramdas to Angar. Nearly fifty villagers from Anjangaum followed him including Madhavrao and many members of his household. Divine love was fully at work in the hearts of these simple and pure country-folk. It was a walk of about three miles; Ramdas and party duly reached Angar.

The brahman Ramdas was there. He came and sat near Ramdas. His looks were full of contempt and his manner cold and overbearing. There was now quite a crowd around Ramdas. The Brahman asked Ramdas a question: "What is panchikarana?"

Ramdas replied that he was not learned and his knowledge of such matters was very little. At this he laughed derisively and then raising his voice told the assembled people that they were veritable fools to have come to pay homage to an impostor whose only qualification was his colossal ignorance. The hearers did not relish this pointed attack and hung their heads down. As for Ramdas, he broadened his usual smile and remained perfectly calm and quiet. Hundreds of visitors streamed into Balwantrao's house, and afforded Ramdas the happiness of their company. Their love for him was marvellous. The brahman chafed and burned with the fire of jealousy. The day passed. Next day there was a big feast. The brahman openly refused to join it.

In the evening he proposed to perform a harikatha. On such occasions Ramdas was made to sit in a prominent place, and the performance would take place in front of him in the midst of a vast multitude. So also did it happen this time. The brahman Ramdas, who brought about the situation to serve his purpose, indirectly levelled at Ramdas a most spirited diatribe. After dilating at length upon the qualities of a hypocritical sadhu, he concluded the katha with this peroration:

"Vagabonds and frauds are abroad, pretending to be sannyasis and sadhus. Beware of them! Only dull-headed people run after them, make much of them and eventually fall an easy prey to their wiles and machinations."

Ramdas was not any the worse for a fresh baptism of abuse. God so willed it and he submitted, his equanimity undisturbed.

(ii) A Wonderful Transformation

Two days later, there was another dinner arranged by a pious merchant of the place. In those days Ramdas was mostly on milk-diet and would take a little food once in two or three days, along with the devotees at their dinner party. On this occasion also the brahman Ramdas had been invited. But he failed to turn up at the appointed time. All the guests waited for his arrival. He was, however, not to be seen. The merchant started to fetch him and after a search found him, but could only persuade him to attend the feast after a great deal of entreaty. At last he came. His face was charred; his looks were haggard and eyes sunk in their sockets. It was evident that envy was fast consuming him. On seeing him come Ramdas felt really glad and asked the merchant to serve him first.

"No, no," he shouted, "I am not going to take any meals today. I have vowed to fast."

Ramdas begged of him to take at least some sweets. He pondered for a while and, to the infinite delight of Ramdas and all, consented to have sweets. Accordingly, some sweet balls or ladoos were placed before him. Ramdas requested all the guests not to start eating until the brahman had commenced to eat. He had about three or four ladoos. All hail, O God of love, Thou hast at last triumphed!

It was observed that the brahman did not feel quite at ease. The kindness and love offered in return for harshness and hate on his part almost overpowered him. He left the scene suddenly. That evening at four, a harikatha function was arranged by a devotee to be performed at his house by an old haridas of the village. Of course Ramdas attended it with Ramcharandas and Bhavanishankerrao. Now the last two would not, in the ordinary course, remain in the town after five in the evening, but would run up to the neighbouring hillocks and spend the nights together in meditation and repetition of Ramnam. When kirtan was still going on they left the place at the usual time and disappeared on the hills.

A mysterious event now took place. Some devotees of Anjangaum (the last village visited by Ramdas) who were away when he was there, but who had seen him at the time of his visit over a year before, were hastening to Angar with the object of meeting him. On their way they happened to pass the hill on which Ramcharandas and Bhavanishankerrao were sitting. Strangely enough, they beheld, as they approached the hill, three men sitting in a line, Ramdas in the middle and the other two, one on each side. They were not surprised. They thought that he in company with the two friends must have gone to the hills for an evening spell. They did not like to disturb the trio, since they discovered them in a state of meditation.

They proceeded straight to Angar hoping to meet Ramdas on his return at nightfall. As they entered the village, they heard the sound of cymbals at the kirtan party, and led by the sound they came to it. But what was their astonishment to see Ramdas sitting in the assembly attending to the kirtan, while they had clearly seen him on the hillock which they had passed a little while ago! He was on the hills and at the same time at the kirtan party too! They were bewildered. They related the matter to the brahman Ramdas who formed one of the assembly at the performance. The miraculous incident produced no small effect on the brahman.

At about eight o'clock that night he met Ramdas at a milk party. His attitude towards Ramdas had, in the meantime, entirely changed. He fell at Ramdas' feet and wept bitterly. He condemned himself in scathing terms and begged piteously to be forgiven. Ramdas asked him what the matter was. It was then that Ramdas heard from his lips the whole story of the double personality. While Ramdas listened his hairs stood on end, his eyes were filled with tears, and his entire frame thrilled with indescribable ecstasy. He only muttered: "It is all Ram's glory. His ways are inscrutable." From the ensuing day, until Ramdas left Angar, this brahman participated heartily in all the festivities and closely associated himself with Ramdas. He evinced a marked love, kindness and regard for Ramdas. What a wonderful transformation! Certainly, there is no more potent force than divine love!

CHAPTER XII

UPALAI—PANDHARPUR—IN THE TRAIN

(i) The Devil Exorcised

From Angar Ramdas went to Upalai with Ramcharandas and Bhavanishankerrao and many others, and was put up in Govind Joshi's house as on the previous occasion. Here again he observed a water fast for three days. Vast crowds of people gathered around him. Govind Joshi's wife was greatly disturbed over the fast. Her motherly heart ached for him. She made several attempts to persuade him to take at least some milk during the fast but he would not take it. Govind Joshi in his overflowing love presented Ramdas with a red woollen shawl and a cap of the same material, for the time was winter and the cold was severe. The red shawl he gave away to Ramcharandas. On the fourth day the people of the whole village arranged for a feast in Vithoba's temple. People of all castes joined in the dinner.

On the morning of the day fixed for the feast, Maruti, a boy who was famous for his mastery of the Gita and for his wonderful intellectual powers in expounding it, requested Ramdas to pay a short visit to his house. Ramdas agreed and in the company of about fifty devotees went to his house. Along with others Ramdas took his seat on the open verandah. Now a woman of the house was brought out and made to sit in the yard below, in front of him.

"This woman," Maruti said, "is possessed by a devil; please have pity on her."

Ramdas looked at her. Her long loose hair was hanging down over her shoulders and arms in a state of disorder. Her face was unusually red; her eyes wide open and revolving in a weird manner. When his eyes met hers she suddenly gave vent to a shrill shriek and began to tear at her hair. Now he asked the assembled devotees to sing the Name of God in chorus. The measured cadence of the sound saturated and thrilled the air. At this the woman became wild and furious and, standing up, uttered scream after scream. After the lapse of a quarter of an hour the singing was stopped and the woman squatted down. Maruti had adorned Ramdas with a flower garland. Taking it out and going to the woman, as inspired by Ram, he threw the garland around her neck, and leaving the place returned to Joshi's house.

In the evening, after the feast, Janardan Pant, who had met Ramdas at Angar, performed a harikatha in front of the temple, a large crowd having collected to listen to him. When the performance was in progress Ramdas observed an old man pushing through the crowd, carrying in his arms the woman who was supposed to have been possessed by the devil. He took his seat with the woman in the temple at the back of Ramdas. The harikatha lasted for two hours and he retired to the small room which he occupied in Joshi's house. Here came the old man with the woman. She prostrated before Ramdas and sat beside him. He saw a great change in her appearance. A settled calmness was on her face. Her eyes were lowered and there was a look of resignation in them. Her lips were moving automatically as it were, and a low sound was heard to be issuing from them. Ramdas listened and found her repeating in a low tone "Ram, Ram, Sitaram," the names sung in a chorus in her presence in the morning. The old man who accompanied her spoke:

"Maharaj, soon after you left us this woman who is a relation of mine fled from the house, and ran like a galloping horse, myself and another pursuing her. We had a hard race. For two miles she ran and then she stopped. However, we overtook her, gasping and exhausted. She cried out in a loud voice:

"Oh! I cannot stay there any longer. I am unable to bear the presence of that saint (meaning Ramdas). I am going away."

Then it appears the old man asked her: "Are you sure, you are leaving for good? Say that on oath."

Then she said: "Mahadev, Hanuman, Rama are my witnesses. I am going, I am gone." So saying she collapsed and fell down unconscious, and the old man with the help of others had to convey her home. From this time she had become her old self again, but she was still weak.

For Ramdas devils are none other than the evil passions that rage in the human breast. They take possession of persons and dominate over them. The only way to drive them out is to awaken in their mind and heart the purity, light and glory of the indwelling Truth. As at the appearance of light darkness vanishes, so in the presence of the pure spirit of God, the evils of the mind disappear, softening the heart with love and joy.

Some of the devotees desired that Ramdas should meet them again in Pandharpur on the Kartik ekadashi fair, an important annual festival of that shrine, where they would all assemble for the occasion. So Ramdas and others including Janardan Pant started from Upalai, and on the way halted at Shetphal where they stopped for the night. Bhajan and kirtan were performed by the villagers during the night. Ramdas had also the opportunity of again seeing and embracing the shopkeeper who had fed him forcibly during the last visit.

(ii) God is Love—in our Heart

The party arrived at Pandharpur on the day previous to ekadashi. Ramdas proposed to occupy the sands of the river Chandrabhaga, and accordingly they settled down on the bank, a few yards from the river. The night was cold. Chill breezes were blowing towards them from the river. The night was spent in wakefulness. Next day, the day of the festival, one by one, the several devotees whom he had met in their villages, began to pour in. Here he came in touch with a new devotee by name Prem Singh, a Rajput. He was fascinated with Ramdas and closely stuck to him. Ramdas observed a fast on this day, taking only a small quantity of milk.

As the day advanced the crowd of pilgrims on the banks increased rapidly. Nearly a lac of people studded both the sides of the river. The vast crowd was divided into groups and some of them had tents pitched on the sands. From various camps hundreds of lights gleamed in the dark. The name of 'Vithal'—the deity of Pandharpur temple—rang forth from thousands of throats, while dancing and singing also commenced in many camps. Large crowds squatted round the central figure of a saint performing harikatha, preaching to the masses the value of devotion. This kind of preaching to the accompaniment of music started at several centres.

He attended one of these performances. He listened for about half an hour to the discourse of Dada Maharaj, a saint from Satara and famous in Maharashtra. Of what he said one thing struck Ramdas as pre-eminently true, viz: "It is not that we have to love God but to realize in our hearts God who is love."

When Ramdas had returned to his seat, one of the devotees coming to him said:

"Maharaj, throughout the day there was a huge rush at the entrance of the temple for the darshan of Vithoba. So access to the temple was difficult. Now, it being midnight, the way to the inner sanctum of the temple is clear. If you wish I can take you for the darshan of Vithoba."

"Ram," Ramdas replied: "Ramdas is witnessing already in front of him Vithoba in thousands of forms. Can't you see Him squatting, standing, walking, dancing and singing in these multitudinous human forms? Do you think Vithoba is only seated in the stone image within the temple? Recognize the truth that He is seated in the shrine of your own heart and in the hearts of all beings and creatures. Verily, He is in all. He is all."

The devotee dropped the suggestion. The night passed. The following day, the whole party of devotees—about fifty in number—had an invitation for dinner from Dhondo Pant, a brahman resident of Pandharpur. After dinner six of the party including Ramdas started on foot for Mohol. A devotee of Mohol led the party and took them to his house.

A small incident relating to Ramcharandas' penchant for japa mala may be cited here. Before starting from Pandharpur he came to Ramdas and handing him a rosary of white tulsi beads said:

"Swamiji, I would have a mala in future because I wish to keep an account of the japa. Do turn it once on your fingers and give it to me."

"Ram, japa-mala is unnecessary for you. You are expected to repeat the divine mantram at all times and in all places," Ramdas replied.

"No, Swamiji, I feel the need of a mala," he persisted.

"All right, as Ram wills," said Ramdas and while revolving the mala between his fingers, it snapped with a sharp sound. The other friends sitting close by exclaimed, turning to

Ramcharandas:

"Right, Swamiji told you not to have a mala, so it snapped."

"Why not?" put in Ramcharandas doggedly. "I shall buy a new one and of a stronger make," and he disappeared for some time and turned up with a new mala of black shining beads.

"Now, Swamiji, you may hold it in your hand for a few minutes and then return it to me," which Ramdas did and he got back the mala this time in sound condition.

Thereafter, he would ostentatiously handle the mala and move the beads on his fingers. On the way to Mohol he would approach Ramdas frequently and say:

"Swamiji, I have done five thousand japa today," to which Ramdas replied with a laugh:

"Ram, as you progress in the task of turning the mala, your ego seems to be assuming vaster proportions while the object of the japa is to diminish it; you are a wonderful Ram!"

(iii) The Supreme Purpose of Life

At night, on the ensuing day, Ramdas attended the hari-katha of Janardan Pant at his house in the same village. On the third day devotees from Angar, Anjangaum and Upalai took part in the feast provided by Babcoji. The same evening Ramdas, Ramcharandas and Bhavanishankerrao left Mohol for Bangalore by train. At the station Ramcharandas did accept a present of rupees eight from Janardan Pant, although Ramdas advised him not to. Some friends including Janardan Pant and Prem Singh followed them as far as Sholapur station where they had to detrain and catch the Bombay Mail. The train arrived but it was overcrowded. There was no room in the third-class carriages. Wherever they sought entrance into the carriage, they were repulsed by the passengers. Observing their struggle two policemen came to the rescue. They rushed forward and opening the door of a carriage provided sitting accommodation for the trio. The policemen were full of love and kindness. Why this? —because God is in all.

The train started. It might have just passed out of the station when a stout Irani (Persian) who was occupying an upper berth, jumped down and requested Ramdas to climb up and have his berth, upon which a thick quilt had been spread so that one could lie on it comfortably. Ramdas declined his kind offer and said that he preferred to remain where he was.

"May I be permitted to sit by your side for a few minutes?" he asked Ramdas.

"By all means," answered Ramdas, and made room for him. He wedged himself between Ramdas and Ramcharandas.

"Do advise me," he urged, "as to how I can remove the illusions of the mind and free it from the turmoil to which it is always subjected, and realize God. I am simply caught up in the attachment to wife, house, money and property."

"You have diagnosed," Ramdas replied, "the disease aright and also have a clear understanding of the remedy for it. Know in the first place that the God you seek is within yourself. He is the life and soul of the universe and to attain Him is the supreme purpose of life. Evil and sorrow are due to your belief that you are separate from this universal Truth. The ego has set up this wall of separation. Have a strong and intense longing to realize Him, that is, to know that your life is one with the life of the universe. Then surrender up the ego by constant identification with Him through prayer, meditation and performance of all actions without desiring their fruit. As you progress on this path, which is the path of devotion, knowledge and self-surrender, your attachment to the unrealities of life will slacken, and the illusions of the mind will be dispelled. Now your heart will be filled with divine love, and your vision purified and equalised, and your actions will become the spontaneous outflow of your immortal being, yielding you the experience of true joy and peace. This is the culmination of human endeavour and fulfilment of the purpose of life."

'Oh, how clearly and impressively you present the Truth," exclaimed the Irani. "I wish I could have more of your society. Pray, come to Secunderabad which is my place and stay with me at least for a day. My wife and relations will be so happy to see you."

Ramdas could not accept his invitation as his next destination had already been fixed to be Bangalore.

CHAPTER XIII

BANGALORE—BOMBAY

(i) A Sadhu Magician

In due time the party reached Bangalore and for the first day stopped at Bhavanishankerrao's house at Malleswaram. Ramdas requested Bhavanishankerrao to arrange for him a separate dwelling place for their stay. A vacant house in the locality near the railway lines, well-known as a haunted house, was pitched upon as his future abode, for the time he remained in Bangalore.

Ramdas and Ramcharandas shifted to the house. It was a straggling and irregular pile of buildings with a decidedly desolate look about it. They selected a spacious room in it for their occupation.

Bhavanishankerrao provided Ramdas with a mat and two blankets. The season was cold. Ramcharandas also settled down beside Ramdas to his left. Ramcharandas had the tiger-skin always with him. In the wanderings through the villages of Sholapur he had not failed to offer Ramdas the full use of it. Wherever he rested or slept, it was on the skin. Here, as well, he laid the skin on the blanket spread out on the floor for Ramdas. He was wearing flashily the red, woollen shawl about his body and a japa-mala was seen running on his fingers. His deep love for Ramdas revealed itself in the unstinted and joyous service he rendered to him. He tenderly looked after Ramdas in every way.

The news of Ramdas' arrival spread, and visitors from the suburbs and the city came to see him in large numbers. For bath and midday meal he had to go to Bhavanishankerrao's house where he was bathed with particular love and care by Sadashivrao, brother of Bhavanishankerrao. When he was soaping the body briskly Ramdas would remark:

"Take care, Ram, if you exert undue pressure whilst rubbing this clay pot (meaning the body) it might break to pieces." And he would laugh.

Very often Ramdas was served with meals first. One day in preparing the dal curry the mother of the house had forgotten to add salt. He took meals without noting the omission. They found it out when they tasted the curry only at their meals. They asked him how it was that he did not call for salt when he was eating the tasteless stuff.

"He never felt anything wrong with the taste," Ramdas replied. "In fact his mind was not there to discriminate taste."

Among the visitors were poet Chattopadhyaya and his talented wife, Kamaladevi. They brought with them many of their friends among whom were a senior wrangler and his devout mother. The poet courted Ramdas' society frequently and for long hours. Being a votary of the goddess of emotion and beauty, he was by nature affectionate and loving. Ramdas enjoyed his company immensely.

One evening in the course of a talk with Ramcharandas, Ramdas discoursed upon attachment and the sense of possession: "Attachment to things is the source of fear and anxiety—the destroyer of peace. The sense of possession is responsible for the restless nature of the mind and so it refuses to be concentrated upon the absolute Truth of your being. Give up, therefore, attachment to the objects you have with you. 'Possess things but do not be possessed by them.' Whenever you accept presents take it that the Lord Himself gives you the things, and the moment an occasion comes when you have to part with them, give them away with as much delight as when you received them. Understand that you are returning them only to Him who gave them to you. In the same light consider every gain and loss. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away."

At noon, the next day, Ramcharandas said: "Swamiji, I wish to buy some religious books in Kanarese, and I intend going to the city for the purpose."

"All right, Ram," Ramdas agreed, "but return soon and see that you do not stay away for the night."

He knew that Ramcharandas owned some money, of which he had made Bhavanishankerrao's mother the custodian. He went to the city which lay about two miles from Malleswaram. On his way back from the city, while nearing Malleswaram, Ramcharandas came across two sadhus on the main road. They told him that they had nothing to eat from morning, and would feel obliged if he could help them with a four-anna bit. Although the amount that he had taken to the city was all spent, he had still money in reserve with Bhavanishankerrao's mother. So he promised the sadhus that he would meet their demand if they followed him.

"In the first place," he suggested to the sadhus, "you would do well to have the darshan of a mahatma residing in this neighbourhood. I will get you his darshan, and then shall look to it that you are paid the money promised." The sadhus agreeing he came direct to Ramdas with them at his heels. He ran to him in advance announcing:

"Swamiji, I have brought two sadhus for your darshan," and rubbed his hands with glee.

"Very good, Ram," Ramdas replied.

The sadhus entered the room. Ramdas requested them to be seated on the blanket occupied by him. It appeared from their respective ages that one was the guru and the other his chela. The older one was a man of middle age, dark, stout and well-built. He advanced and sat down close to Ramdas on the rug while the younger man sat on the floor at a respectable distance. Ramcharandas occupied his own seat.

A closer scrutiny of the sadhu seated beside Ramdas disclosed further particulars of him. He had a short and thick black beard and a dense mass of well-combed hair on his head, clipped to the shoulder on which it rested in curls. His face was of a manly cut, having strong and rough features. He wore a tight, short, half-arm jacket. His body was solid and muscular. Around his neck was a thick red string with a single rudraksh in the centre. From this neck chord was hanging down a tiny bottle, suspended by a string. His wrists were bangled with iron wire rings. He spoke with a peculiar intonation from which it was evident that he was a native of Tamil country.

(ii) Wonderful Lila

ACT I

Now the sadhu beckoning Ramcharandas to his side said: "Get me a dry blade of straw!"

Ramcharandas went out and fetched a straw he wanted. Taking it from him the sadhu broke it into small pieces with his fingers and asked Ramcharandas to open his mouth. Ramcharandas obeyed, and the sadhu threw the pieces of straw into his wide opened mouth. But the strange thing that happened was that they turned immediately into cloves.

"Now let me have some loose earth," he next asked.

Ramcharandas immediately got him some. Taking a handful of the earth he again called on Ramcharandas to open his mouth which he did. The sand was shoved into his mouth, and Ramcharandas was cheerfully exhibiting a lump of sugar in it. But his cheerfulness was not to last long, as the ensuing events would presently show.

The magical performance over, the sadhu turning to Ramdas said: "You appear to be greatly emaciated. Look at me. How strong and healthy I am! I would you were also like me. I can make you stout and vigorous. What do you say?"

"Maharaj," Ramdas replied with folded palms, "Ramdas is perfectly satisfied with his present physical condition. God has made him what he is, and he does not desire anything else."

"No, no," he put in, "you must grow stout, no good to remain as you are." Saying thus he removed the tiny bottle hanging on his neck and poured out of it a small quantity of ashes on his right palm and cried in a voice of command:

"Well, open your mouth."

Ramdas had to yield. The ash instantly found a place inside his mouth.

"Swallow it," was the next fiat. Ramdas swallowed.

"This ash has the charm and power of converting you into a robust figure," he assured and replaced the bottle. Now for the second act of the drama.

ACT II

The cold being severe Ramdas was made to wear the woollen cap and had his body covered with a blanket. The sadhu demanded the cap. Ramdas removing it from his head handed it over to him. When he tried to put it on he discovered that it was too small for his head and would not fit in, the size of his head being much larger than Ramdas'. He returned the cap exclaiming: "This won't do."

Now he called for the kambal that covered Ramdas. Promptly it was put in his hands. On examining he found that it was not only coarse and thick but also unwieldy in size. He threw it back. Then the sadhu's eyes rested on the tiger-skin, his fingers feeling its smoothness. Now a glance at Ramcharandas showed an anxious look on his face.

"This is a very nice skin," the sadhu remarked and, tugging at it, said, "let me examine it properly."

Ramdas got up and allowed him to draw it towards him. A smile of approval flitted across his face.

"Here," he called his chela, "take it; you may fling it across your shoulders; it is so light and soft."

Ramcharandas' face was now quite a study. It was deadly pale. Then the sadhu's eyes turned round to Ramcharandas. He did not care to notice the pallor and despair on his visage. The sadhu's next object of attraction was Ramcharandas' red and lustrous shawl on which he gazed with a steady and intent stare. Ramcharandas was not slow to understand. He knew what was coming. He thought it fit to surrender up the shawl before the sadhu asked for it. Instantly unwinding it off his body, Ramcharandas, like a good obedient boy, placed the shawl in front of the sadhu.

The sadhu appreciated Ramcharandas' power of insight. The shawl met the good fortune of gracing the other shoulder of the Sadhu's chela. The distraction of the moment had made Ramcharandas drop down the japa-mala of shining black beads near his asan, and it became the sadhu's next object of interest. It must be said here to the sadhu's credit that he was a man of taste—nay, he was a consummate artist.

Without ceremony—there was none necessary—the sadhu took the japa-mala from the floor and spread it out with both hands. A moment more, and it was round his neck, hanging gracefully on his broad chest. With a wide grin he looked at himself self-complacently and felt happy.

Now the third and crowning act of the drama.

ACT III

Ramcharandas had promised the sadhu four annas. It was time to call for it. Being reminded by him of it Ramcharandas said:

"Maharaj, the money is in the keeping of a mother who lives about a furlong from here. I have to obtain it from her."

"No fear," replied the sadhu encouragingly: "you may go and fetch it. I can afford to wait here until you return. I don't at all mind the trouble. Do go at once, my boy."

Ramcharandas started and went, only to return within ten minutes—indeed, he must have run fast to and fro—clutching in his hand a small meshed pouch of twine which contained all his wealth.

Sitting in front of the sadhu, Ramcharandas opened the purse and turning it upside down rolled out the contents, producing a jingling sound. One after the other the coins dropped down on the floor — four silver rupees and a four-anna coin. Ramcharandas was about to pick up the four-anna bit for presenting it to the sadhu when the sadhu's right hand shot out and his large open palm grabbed the coins, and collecting all of them in his grasp, he transferred them coolly into his pocket. All this was the work of a few seconds. Now Ramcharandas jerked his head up and was gazing at the ceiling with the empty pouch in his hand.

"Ram, why are you so unkind as to withhold the bag? Don't you see that he has greater need of it than yourself?"

These words of Ramdas caused him to lower his upturned head. The last vestige of cheer which he had when the sugar lump was in his mouth had completely vanished from his face. He resigned the bag to the sadhu who, refilling it with the coins, tenderly slipped it into his pocket.

The sadhu having played his part rose to depart, and without the usual formality of leave-taking he walked out with his chela and disappeared.

All the time Ramdas had been with great difficulty suppressing the laugh that was seeking an outlet. Now it burst out with all its pent-up force.

(iii) Feast in the Company of Rishis

When Ramdas continued laughing for some minutes, Ramcharandas remained sullen and thoughtful, but later, he also joined in the laugh. He could not help it.

"Swamiji," he exclaimed, "I did not mind so much about the sadhu's appropriation of other things, even the money, but, when he took the tiger-skin, to tell you the truth, Swamiji, I could not help feeling an acute shooting pain in the interior of my stomach. I can well understand now," he added with a curious smile, "that you are at the bottom of the whole affair. You seem to be so simple, quiet and innocent. This is all your lila. Only last night you warned me against attachment and the sense of possession, and today you have enacted this play, in order to teach me a lesson. This is all undoubtedly your own work."

"Ram," said Ramdas, "you are a marvel. Do you forget that it was you who brought here the wandering sadhus, with the apparent object of showing to them Ramdas, while your real intention must have been to present them with all the articles they have taken away from here? They have after all come by their own. So there need be no thought of any loss. Remember, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away."

Shortly after this, on the suggestion of Ramdas, Ramcharandas left for Northern India.

Ramdas received many invitations from the visitors for dinner. He stipulated a condition for accepting the invitations which was that, along with him, a dozen sadhus should be fed. Dinners followed one after the other. The one at the senior wrangler Kuppuswamy Iyengar's house was attended by the poet Chattopadhaya and his wife. It was a jolly occasion. An assortment of twelve sadhus was a picturesque sight. Each sadhu belonged to a separate sect and denomination. There was the tilakdhari, the jatadhari, the clean-shaven and orange-robed sannyasi, the yogadandi, the udasi, the dashanami, the Brijvasi, the Ramanandi, etc. The meal was served in a spacious hall of the house. The poet and Ramdas sat in the line of sadhus for dinner. The poet, elated by the uniqueness of the situation, remarked:

"Ramdas, I feel as if I am transported back to the days of ancient India—to the age of the rishis. Am I not really dining in the company of those distant ancestors?"

Indeed, the experience was unparalleled. The sadhus dispersed after meals and Ramdas, remaining with the friends for some time, also returned to his retreat.

Some days later, he again started the practice of pranayama. Now Bhavanishankerrao also joined him. Throughout the day and night Ramdas went on vigorously with the practice. Once again he was seized with an insatiable hunger. He had to run to Bhavanishankerrao's house twice or thrice a day for food. Once, one afternoon, he found himself in their kitchen, with a voracious appetite, where a mother of the house was preparing rice cakes. He begged for the cakes. The mother was very kind. At first he was served with two cakes which disappeared in a trice and he looked for more. As she served he ate on until he must have devoured about fourteen cakes, in addition to four cups of coffee and half a dozen plantains. Then somewhat satisfied he left the place, and returning to his retreat sat up in asan for pranayama. In ten minutes the fire of hunger was ablaze again. He jumped out and made for Bhavanishankerrao's house once more, with as much speed as his legs could carry him. Then again he gorged himself with a lot of eatables. Ramdas told them that the gluttonous demon Bakasura must have taken his seat in his stomach! Aftersome time the pranayama stopped and the normal appetite was restored.

Ramdas' sojourn in Bangalore was for over two months. He was now feeling a call from Jhansi. The friends of Jhansi whom he had met during his last visit to that city had expressed through repeated letters their keen desire to see Ramdas. He left. Bangalore for Kasaragod. Bhavanishankerrao and the members of his household gave him a send-off at the railway station. Their love was indeed illimitable.

In due time Ramdas reached Kasaragod. He once again met the friends of the place and also Ramcharan sannyasi who were all eagerly awaiting his return. After the darshan of Gurudev he proceeded to Mangalore in the company of Ramcharan.

During his three days' stay in Mangalore he visited the house of a devotee at Pentland Peth where he was treated with great kindness and love. Ramcharan was with him and both had also walks on the Kadri Hill, the scene of Ramdas' sadhanas in the previous years.

(iv) Owns not a single copper

From Mangalore, after three days' stay, Ramdas sailed for Bombay. The passengers on the boat looked after Ramdas with great tenderness and care. He reached Bombay docks. No notice of his arrival was given in advance to Sanjivrao of Bombay. Ramdas ran from street to street through the brilliantly lit city, as the boat had arrived in the evening. The policemen at the junction of roads guided him. He made his way to Gamdevi where Sanjivrao resided. Sanjivrao and his wife were quite taken by surprise but were delighted to welcome him. It appeared they were speaking of him only a few seconds before he suddenly dawned upon them. He stopped in Bombay for about five days.

Mother Rukmabai with her girl Ramabai was at this time staying in Kurla, a suburb of Bombay, in her sister's house. The girl was then about thirteen years of age. Ramdas had an invitation from this house and accordingly he visited it. Rukmabai and her daughter came and sat in front of him.

"Well," the mother said, "what about the marriage of this girl who is growing up?"—a question thrust right into Ramdas' face. "I have not a single pie with me," she continued, "and she has to be married."

"While you own up that you have not a pie he, in his turn, must confess that he too does not possess a single copper!" Ramdas replied with a spice of humour, and laughed.

The answer nettled her a great deal and she placed before him a lurid picture of his dereliction of duty and lack of responsibility. He listened to her with a cool indifference and said:

"Why do you worry over the matter? God's will is supreme. All things happen as He wills and at the time determined by Him."

"How can you say so? Do you mean to say then that human effort has no value?" she retorted.

"Human effort," he replied, "is necessary only to learn that human effort as such is useless, and God's will alone is the real power that controls and brings about all events. When you realize this truth, human effort ceases and divine will starts its work in you, and then you do all things in the freedom of the soul, liberated from care, fear and sorrow. This is the real life to be attained. So leave all things to the Lord by complete surrender to Him."

The mother did not seem to be impressed with this philosophy. The talk on the subject came to an end. Next day he returned to Sanjivrao's in the evening.

From Bombay he sailed by steamer to Veraval. On the boat he found himself in the company of Muhammadans who were very kind to him. There was also a brahman lad on the boat in charge of a tea shop. He took a great liking for Ramdas and provided him with eatables. The other passengers were also very kind.

CHAPTER XIV

JUNAGAD—LIMBDI

(i) Saints are like Children

Next morning the boat reached Veraval port. Alighting, Ramdas entered the city. Veraval is an important trading harbour. He directed his steps straight to the railway station. On the way he was invited by milk vendors who gave him cups of milk which refreshed him. At the station he met a sannyasi in whose company he travelled in the train. Reaching Junagad at ten in the night, Ramads walked up to the akhada of sannyasis of which Kashigirji was the mahant. Ramdas had the privilege of living for three weeks in this Ashram when he last visited Junagad. Kashigirji received Ramdas with great delight. Next day he met Maganlal at his residence. Maganlal also was overflowed with joy at the sight of him. It must be remembered that when he was in Junagad on the previous occasion Maganlal and Kantilal were extremely devoted to him and had treated him with love and care.

It was decided that he should stay in a garden belonging to Kashigirji's ashram at a distance of half a mile from the town. In the garden was a small open thatched hut occupied by two sadhus. He joined them. One of them was a man with a long beard and the other, Atmanand by name, was a clean-shaven sannyasi.

Atmanand was a man of bulky proportions. He was quiet and calm by nature. One of his characteristics was his spontaneous laugh every five or ten minutes, apparently for no reason. He was indifferent alike to the cleanliness of his body or his clothes. He would be found sitting for hours at one place in silence and with vacant looks, the world having seemingy no existence for him.

The other sadhu with the beard was an active old man. He was busy the whole day doing some work or other. He possessed a cheerful and pleasant temperament, except when his only son would come from the city to tease him and pick up a quarrel with him. They used to fight like cocks in a hand-to-hand scuffle. At the bottom of the frequent quarrels, Ramdas could clearly see, there was a strong mutual attachment —for that matter, all strife and violence in the world can be traced to the same source.

Both the sadhus were kind and hospitable to him. The time was winter and hence the cold was severe. They had a fireplace in the middle of the floor of the shed. The sadhus slept around the fire at right angles to one another. By joining them at bedtime, Ramdas formed another angle. Maganlal would come to him in this garden every day and take him home for the midday meal. The bearded old man cooked roties in the shed for himself and Atmanand. Very often they had to be satisfied with only dry roties, salt and chillies for dinner. One early morning Atmanand must have felt unusually hungry. He asked the old saḍhu if there was any remnant from the roties of the previous night. In response the old man placed before Atmanand a napkin containing some fragments of roties which resembled thick pieces of white leather. Rolling up his sleeves Atmanand fell to. Piece after piece of the stiff dry bread found its way into his capacious mouth. He possessed strong teeth with which he munched them. As he went on with the meal, to humour his palate that craved for fine and delicious food, he was uttering at every mouthful of the dry and tasteless stuff:

"Ladoo—ladoo—ladoo; poori—poori— poori;

jilabi—jilabi—jilabi; barfi—barfi—barfi."

The same afternoon, he complained of stomachache. Evidently, the dry bread had put his digestive apparatus out of order. "I am going to the doctor," he said and left the garden. He turned up in the evening quite fit and cheerful.

"Maharaj, did you get medicine from the doctor?" inquired the old sadhu.

"I did," he replied, with a bland smile. "The doctor gave me four pills; I swallowed them all. They were as big as cricket balls—ladoos, you know! The doctor prescribed ladoos as the best remedy. Now I am all right; indeed, wonderful pills!" and he laughed.

Once Maganlal took Ramdas on a visit to a famous saint of Junagad—Vyasji. He was an old man, aged about seventy, and was lean and short in stature. The remarkable thing about him was that his wrinkled skin had a golden lustre. Ramdas spent an hour in his delectable company, for he found the saint simple and pure like a child. He evinced marked love for Ramdas. He put Ramdas two hackneyed questions:

"How is one to control the restless mind?"

"By constant repetition of God's Name," Ramdas replied, "and surrender of all actions to Him."

"Where does this practice lead to?" was the next question.

"It leads to the vision of God everywhere which means immortality and bliss."

He was pleased with the answers and fondly embraced Ramdas.

Again, on another occasion, Maganlal escorted him to the distant Muchkund ashram on the way to Girnar Hill in which Ramdas had resided during his previous visit to Junagad. The ashram was now occupied by a sannyasini, popularly known as Mataji.

She was a young lady, dressed in ochre-coloured robes, living alone in the ashram. There was a pure lustre on her calm features. The sound of 'Shivoham' was constantly issuing from her lips. She expressed great joy on beholding Ramdas. She lived an austere and holy life. O! Mataji, all glory to thee! After a short stay in the ashram, Ramdas and Maganlal retraced their steps to the city.

Kantilal and his father had their home in Limbdi, a state in Kathiawar. Hearing of his arrival at Junagad, Kantilal came down to take Ramdas to his place. In due course he left Junagad for Limbdi with Kantilal and Maganlal.

(ii) Sugarcandy Mothers

Limbdi is a small state ruled by a Rajput prince who is designated as Thakore Saheb. The ruling prince is Sir Daulat Singh—a broad-minded and generous-hearted man. He is greatly loved by his subjects and has proved himself to be a true guardian of their interests and welfare.

In Limbdi Ramdas was lodged in Kantilal's house, situated in a bylane. Coming to know of his arrival, hundreds of people of Limbdi rushed into Kantilal's house to see him. All grades of people streamed in. Officers of the state, merchants and doctors paid him daily visits. Then again men and women of middle and poor classes also came in vast numbers. Every caste, creed and sect was represented, of which the brahman and the Jain communities formed the majority. A large part of the population of the state belonged to the latter class. He received the visitors in a spacious carpeted apartment on the second floor of the building, while for the night he retired to a small room on the third floor.

Before the crowded audience, Ramdas poured himself out in the language of love and joy on the charm and power of

God's Name, and on the blessedness of God-realization. The visitors listened to his discourses with rapt attention. Here he chose to live on milk diet. The news spread, and hundreds of mothers came with lotas full of milk from early morning till afternoon. The quantity of milk they brought was so much that he could well-nigh have bathed in it. He had to take a sip—very often a drop through the finger tip—from every milk pot so as to satisfy the kind donors.

Kantilal's house thus became a scene of liveliness and bustle all through the day and till late in the night. Kantilal then made this observation:

"Swamiji, you have converted our humble home into a veritable temple."

Being apprised of his arrival the Thakore Saheb sent one of his officers to invite Ramdas to his palace. About eleven o'clock in the morning, he was taken in a carriage to his princely residence. Kantilal and Maganlal accompanied him. He was received by the prince in a small, well-furnished room. He sat down in an asan on the carpet, and the others in the room also squatted on the floor. Beside the prince was seated an English lady. Ramdas talked freely, narrating the experiences he had gained in the course of his travels. He spoke with the familiarity of a child when it recounts its doings to the fondly listening mother. Indeed, there was such a mother among the auditors. She was the English lady, Miss Elizabeth Sharpe, to whom he would refer in future as 'mother Elizabeth,' and to the Thakore Saheb as "Raja Ram". Raja Ram was also highly delighted at the frank and simple talks of Ramdas in which he would be so deeply absorbed as to lose all account of time. At half-past twelve Raja Ram would start glancing at his wrist-watch and exclaim:

"Oh! it is past twelve. I have to be in my state office by one." Then the meeting would break up, and Ramdas with the young friends would return to Kantilal's.

For a fortnight he remained in Limbdi, and every day he had to visit the palace where he would spend an hour or two in the society of Raja Ram and mother Elizabeth, both of whom would come to fetch him in their motor-car. He discoursed upon divine love and eternal happiness, presenting instances in his rambles in which how the former had prevailed. They listened and were lost in a state of sweet oblivion. The pure love in the heart of mother Elizabeth induced her one day to take Ramdas to her neat little bungalow, in the midst of a beautiful garden. She called her abode, Shri Krishna Nivas. She was so loving and kind.

In the afternoons the room in which Ramdas received visitors would be filled by ladies. Of these, two mothers who were very old did not fail to come every day. In spite of their decrepitude they would climb up the stairs on all fours and directly totter towards him and push into his mouth large pieces of sugarcandy. Hence they went by the name of sugarcandy mothers. They would softy rub their palms on his cheeks and gazing on him with a fond smile, say: "O! my beloved."

One evening, in response to an invitation of the old Rani Saheb—the widowed Rani of the late Thakore Saheb—he visited the zenana or that part of the palace which was reserved for the ladies of the prince's household. The retired Dewan of Limbdi, a quiet and pious old man, escorted him to the place. The Rani Saheb, of course, observed purdah. She sat behind a perforated screen.

In a small front room he was made to sit on a raised asan. The ladies behind the screen could see the people in the outer room but not vice versa. A brahman puranik was also there. It appeared that the devout old mother was utilizing her afternoon hours in listening to the readings of scriptures. She desired that Ramdas should speak. He expressed himself in Hindi. He dilated at length on the hollowness of life, if it was not devoted to the attainment of divine knowledge and universal love. His words flowed in a spontaneous current for nearly half an hour. At the close of his talk there followed a dead silence for about five minutes. Then the voice of the Rani in a clear and measured modulation filtered through the metallic screen:

"Look at his magnificent vairagya! How I wish I were a man instead of a woman, hopelessly caught in a golden cage! If I were a man I could have a life like his—free and blissful."

The words were addressed to the Dewan Saheb. In her tone there was a marked tinge of anguish. Having taken some milk and fruit kindly proffered by the Rani Saheb, Ramdas took leave of her and returned to his rooms.

(iii) "From the Maze of Illusion into the Maze of God!"

Ramdas paid a visit to a sannyasi ashram where he was kindly received by the resident sannyasis. At their request he spoke a few words on God-realization which he always held forth as the only purpose of life.

Again he had an occasion to call on the Jain sadhus in their chief ashram in Limbdi. Jainism is considered as old as the Vedas. Its teachings, in many respects, resembled those of Buddhism. The creed of nonviolence is observed by the Jains in an extreme form. The Jain sadhus have a semicircular strip of cloth covering their lips, placed in position by thin ribbons fastened round the nether part of the head. They also carry a soft duster for sweeping the floor before sitting on it, lest they might kill the vermin that may happen to be on it. For similar reasons, they would drink only boiled water and never eat by lamp-light; they finish their evening meal before sunset. Jainism holds absolute purity of life and non-violence as the way, and liberation and peace as the goal.

On spending a delightful half hour with the sadhus in this ashram, Ramdas was next taken to another Jain ashram where nearly two hundred Jain ladies had congregated to listen to a discourse by him. He was simply blest with the sight of the kind mothers. He sat on a raised dais and spoke for about three quarters of an hour at a stretch upon purity, love and peace. He was all through filled with an inexpressible rapture. Two prominent and charitable Jain merchants, Ugarchand Shet and Mohanbhai who had conceived a great love for him, had arranged for the visits to the Jain ashrams, and they also entertained Ramdas in their own residences.

During one of his visits to the palace, Raja Ram took Ramdas to his puja room where he saw a number of framed silver images of incarnations of God and also pictures of saints. Raja Ram was a devotee of Sri Krishna. He was past sixty but possessed a strong, tall and stout physical frame. His life was controlled by strict discipline. He would rise at three o'clock every morning and spend the hours till day break in worship and meditation.

Once he pressed Ramdas to accept a present of a costly silk shawl but Ramdas had to decline the offer, reminding him that the shawl was intended for princes and not for fakirs. Ramdas was wearing only one piece of khadi cloth. The time was winter, the cold was bitter, and chill breezes were blowing. He was indifferent to the rigours of the season, but the motherly heart of the English lady ached for him. She persuaded Raja Ram to give him some plain, warm clothing.

In fact Ramdas was content with the simple cloth he had.

However, through Raja Ram's and the mother's repeated pressure, he agreed to exchange his khadi cloth for a plain, woollen one. The old khaddar piece was shared between them—the fents being prized as mementos. Still the mother was not satisfied. Next day she wanted Ramdas to be dressed also in a long, woollen gown. In a short time the gown was ready. It was a heavy thing made of thick tweed on which Raja Ram had set a high value. Ramdas put it on once in their presence and executed a caper or two at which they had a merry laugh. That was the first and last occasion he used the gown.

In the small room, on the third floor, Ramdas remained at nights. Kantilal and Maganlal kept him company. Maganlal possessed a keen sense of humour. He could perfectly imitate the mannerisms of the visitors who came to see Ramdas. He would make Ramdas laugh by his mimicry. Once he wittily remarked:

"Swamiji, I have been attentively listening to your teachings, but I could not make head or tail of them. It would all seem to me to be only a leap from the Mayaghotala into the Brahma-ghotala," i.e., from the maze of illusion into the maze of God.

Of the visitors that came to see Ramdas from outside the Limbdi state, there were two—Dr. Shukla, a brahman, and Chunibhai, a Jain. They hailed from Wadhwan, another Indian state. They expressed a desire to have him with them in their state for some days. He accepted the invitation and proceeded to Wadhwan.

He had also a letter and money order from Kashirambhai of Surat. The latter had met Ramdas during his visit to Junagad. Now he had settled down in Surat. He asked Ramdas to go over to him for a few days on finishing his tours in Kathiawar.

CHAPTER XV

WADHWAN—SURAT—JHANSI

(i) Ramcharandas Again

Ramdas arrived at Wadhwan city. For the first night he was put up in a vacant hospital building. Maganlal had adhered closely to him and, at the time, for him there was none in the world but Ramdas. He followed Ramdas like a shadow, doing every kind of service. On the second day Ramdas was shifted to Chunibhai's house. Here the people of the city started coming to see him. Dr. Shukla, an enthusiastic and earnest seeker after truth, paid him frequent visits. The Dewan of the state, a capable and pious man, also treated Ramdas with great affection. Also some friends from Limbdi came to see him again here. He met a sadhaka, Jivaraj, who lived in a small tent outside the city. Suddenly Ramcharandas put in an appearance and proposed again to stick on to him.

Mulshanker, an old brahman from Dhrangadhra, came to take him to his place. Ramdas started. It was decided to go as far as Wadhwan junction by taxi. It was morning. They arrived at the motor-stand. To bid him farewell, quite a crowd followed him. While taxis were available at all times, that day, in spite of their waiting for nearly an hour, no taxi could be had. The friends showed signs of dejection and disappointment. Ramdas all the while was quite cheerful. Eventually there was a return march to the city. Ramdas was seen going back smiling and dancing in the streets. Turning to the friends he said:

"Submission to the Lord's will means no worry and dejection. It is clear, He wills that Ramdas should leave the place by train."

There was a noon train. He and the party arrived at the station. Now the question arose if Maganlal should accompany Ramdas any further. He had been away with Ramdas from Junagad for about three weeks. Moreover, Ramcharandas who had now joined him could attend to him. So he asked Maganlal to return to his family, but he shook his head to signify that the advice was no good and he was bent upon escorting him. This was a problem for Ram to solve, but the Lord knows how to carry out His will.

Ramdas declared: "Listen, Ram, if you insist upon following him he will have to take up a water-fast, as long as you are with him. This is Ram's will. What do you say?"

"I shall also do the same," was his calm reply.

"Maganlal," a friend then urged, "you are a fine fellow: you would go with him only to inflict on him a fast; give up the mad idea; better stop away."

He was obdurate for some time but at last yielded. In due time, Ramdas and Ramcharandas arrived at Dhrangadhra with their escort. They were welcomed by a rich merchant who lodged them in the upper storey of a warehouse, facing the main road. Ramdas still continued on milk diet. Here again many people from the city visited him—sadhus and householders, men, women and children. He talked to them on his pet subject—devotion to God.

The next morning Maganlal was there in the room, falling at the feet of Ramdas like a felled tree. He seemed to have dropped from the clouds, so unexpected was his appearance. His deep affection for Ramdas had drawn him to the latter again.

"Swamiji, forgive me," he appealed sitting up, "I simply could not resist coming. I am not pressing to go with you any further. When you leave for Surat, I shall turn back to Junagad."

Mulshanker was smitten with love for Ramdas. He was a sweet-natured and meek, old soul. He would not be happy if he did not hug Ramdas to his bosom at least half a dozen times a day. He was saying that he had also the blessed opportunity of once embracing Mahatma Gandhi.

Ramdas' stay in Dhrangadhra was short. By an evening train he left for Surat with Ramcharandas. It was here at the station of Dhrangadhra that Ramdas parted with the tweed gown presented by Raja Ram. He forced it on Mulshanker, in fact he threw the robe on his shoulders when the train had just begun to move from the station. Maganlal, parting company with Ramdas, returned to his native place.

(ii) Ramcharandas turns Dandy

Ramdas reached Rander, a small place in the suburbs of Surat, where the old friend Kashirambhai resided. He and his wife—a noble pair—hailed Ramdas with unfeigned delight. They lived a retired life, utilizing most of their time in devotion, puja and the reading of scriptures. Sorrow, the great awakener, had completely turned their minds from the unrealities of life towards God, the only Truth. Grown up sons and daughters had passed away before their very eyes, leaving the parents in their old age to the exclusive devotion of God. They overwhelmed Ramdas with their kind ministrations.

One afternoon, Kashirambhai had a special reading of a religious book treating of the seven steps or planes in the spiritual growth of man. The reading over, he faced Ramdas and said:

"Shall I tell you to what plane you have reached?" Ramdas did not reply.

"Applying the tests here given," he continued, tapping on the book by his side: "I can declare that you have passed the fifth plane and are approaching the end of the sixth."

Kashirambhai had a humorous disposition. He told a story of two sadhus which threw his hearers into fits of laughter:—

Once two sadhus came to a town from different directions. One settled down beneath a peepal tree and the other under the shade of a banyan tree. Hearing of their arrival a bania householder first went to the sadhu of the peepal tree and prostrated before him.

"Maharaj," said the devotee, "it appears another mahatma has come to our town. Do you know him?"

"Yes," returned the sadhu contemptuously, "I know him; he is a buffalo."

Soon after, the devotee arming himself with a bunch of hay visited the sadhu of the banyan tree and, placing the hay before him, prostrated.

"Well," cried out the sadhu: "What do you mean by this? Why this hay?"

"It is an offering, maharaj; deign to feed upon it and bless your devotee," appealed the bania with folded palms.

"What! are you mad?—eat hay!" flared up the sadhu.

"Maharaj, a sadhu below the peepal tree, at the other corner of the town, was good enough to inform me that you were a buffalo. So I thought I could bring you a fitting present," coolly said the devotee.

"How could you believe him? Have you no sense?" asked the sadhu reprovingly.

"Maharaj, how could a poor and ignorant man like your slave dare to understand sadhus? A mahatma alone can know a mahatma," returned the devotee.

"Go then and tell him he is an ass," said the sadhu.

The bania devotee left the place, and directly going to the bazaar, purchased a seer of cotton seeds and making a bundle of it, proceeded to the first sadhu of the peepal tree. Untying the bundle he poured out the contents in front of the sadhu and prostrated before him.

"How now," asked the sadhu with a surprised look, "what is this for?—it is cotton seed!"

"Right, maharaj—a stuff so dear to you. Do accept the humble present and making a full meal of it, shower your grace upon your slave," prayed the bania.

"Is anything wrong with you?—what do you mean, eat cotton seed?" uttered the sadhu in consternation.

"Why not? maharaj, a sadhu over there, beneath the banyan tree, told me that you are an ass. An ass has a great partiality for cotton seed—"

"You fool," he roared in rage, "don't you see that I am not an ass?"

"How should I know, maharaj—a poor man like me caught in the meshes of maya! It is said: a mahatma alone can recognize a mahatma," replied the devotee with a sly twitch at the corner of his thin lips.

The sadhu was by this time thoroughly roused and, rising to his feet, said in an imperious voice:

"Bhaktraj, take me to the place where the other mahatma is. I should like to teach him how to speak of his betters."

They went. It appears there was a terrible fight between the two mahatmas, the bania devotee witnessing the fun from a distance. The affair ended in the sadhus going without food for the whole day!

Rander is situated on the banks of the river Tapti. Ramdas was having his daily bath in the river accompanied by Ramcharandas. In the matter of bath Ramcharandas exercised absolute control over him. Sometimes he would go to the length of making Ramdas yield to his will by threats, as a mother would do with a contumacious child.

"Swamiji," he would say in a stern voice, "you should not take bath there, come this side."

He would then take Ramdas by the arm and almost drag him into knee-deep water and rub and scrub him as a syce would do a horse! There was no doubt that Ramcharandas was doing this out of the great love he bore for Ramdas. In a few days Ramdas found that he had lost all independence of action at the riverside. One day, Ramdas in a humble tone and with joined palms, said to him:

"Ram, your treatment of Ramdas reminds him of the attitude of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's nephew towards him. It is said that he domineered over the child-like saint in a similar way. Eventually, Sri Ramakrishna had to send him away. So Ramdas would also request you to leave him alone and take yourself off."

Ramcharandas grinned and remained silent. He frequented the market place and made friends with many merchants. One day he came to Ramdas and said:

"Swamiji, the merchant friends wish to present me with cloth; I would have something for you also. What shall we have?"

"Mendicants as we are, the best suited cloth for us is khadi which is coarse and durable and serves all purposes. As for Ramdas, he has already one and does not need any more," Ramdas answered.

His face showed that he did not agree. He went to the market and returned in the evening. What did Ramdas behold? A sadhu dressed in tiptop style! He wore a long robe of fine muslin with shining buttons. He flourished in his hand a fashionable and costly umbrella, and white rubber-soled, canvas shoes encased his feet. At the sight of this smart figure Ramdas bowed and said:

"Ram, you know Ramdas is a humble fakir. You are now transformed into a saheb. How can a fakir have anything in common with a saheb?"

Ramcharandas was not a man of words. He smiled away Ramdas' remarks. He would always have his own way.

From the friends of Jhansi Ramdas received an invitation and railway fare for one passenger. It was evident that he alone should proceed to Jhansi. He broached the subject to Ramcharandas who became rebellious.

"You are always for throwing me up," he spoke passionately.

"It is God's will, Ram, and you have to submit to it," said Ramdas. "Moreover, it behoves you that you should travel alone, gathering experience in your own way. Ramdas would advise you to go to the banks of the Narbada and spend some time in that inspiring atmosphere."

(iii) Krishna, Christ and Buddha

On the day fixed Ramdas started from Surat towards the north. Ramcharandas travelled with him for a few stations and then parted company. At Ujjain Ramdas had to break journey. He stopped in a dharmashala for the night and the next day set out again. In the train a young Mussalman met him. Sitting by the side of Ramdas he recounted his sorrows. Ramdas spoke to him about surrender to God as the panacea for all ills of life. He wished to know a way to control the restless mind. Ramdas asked him to repeat the Ram-mantram.

Arriving at Bhopal, where the train halted for thirty minutes, the Muslim friend provided him with milk and fruits. As Bhopal was his destination, he took leave of Ramdas with God's Name on his lips.

It was midnight when Ramdas reached Jhansi station. Passing the night in the passenger shed, early next morning he made his way to the city which lay two miles from the station. He went direct to Mahadev Prasad's house. At the sight of Ramdas Mahadev Prasad was convulsed with joy. He fell at Ramdas' feet, kissed them and rising embraced him again and again, tears streaming down his eyes through uncontrollable emotion.

It was over two years since Ramdas had last remained under his hospitable roof for months. With what affection and kindness did he then look after him! His longing to see Ramdas again must have been indeed intense, as it was obvious from the manner in which he received him.

In the evening Ramdas met Ramkinkar—that devoted friend who with such studious care had tended him on his journey to Badrinarayan. He was also beside himself with delight on seeing Ramdas. His stay was decided to be in the Ram Mandir in which he had resided on the last occasion. Hence Ramkinkar led him to the temple. The old pandaji was there. He came out to welcome Ramdas. His huge frame trembled with emotion and he repeatedly hugged Ramdas to his bosom.

Next day, news reaching the other friends, they came in large numbers. Crowds collected in the temple in the evenings, and Ramdas delivered in English—his knowledge of Hindi being still poor—his message of love and joy. Followers of different prevailing sects and creeds held talks with him, either to clear their doubts or to press their views on him. He appreciated their varied standpoints and reconciled himself to them, because, after all, it was the Lord who has planned this variegated world-play. It was given to him to see and love Him in all.

Ramdas paid a visit to Sipri Bazaar where also he met many friends and returned to the city. Now he expressed a wish to live outside the city. A place was pitched upon named Atkhamba. A small building consisting of a single room and a verandah stood on the far corner of the lake Lakshmi-talao. At the edge of the lake there was an eight-pillared minaret, made of red stone, with a beautifully shaped cupola, after the style of Moghul architecture. On account of the eight pillars it came to be called Atkhamba. To sit on the pedestal of this structure, facing the lake, is to view a charming sight—the still waters of the lake reflecting as if in a mirror the surrounding scenery.

A peepal tree spread its extended branches over the building. A stone image of Hanuman, besmeared with red paint, stood below the tree enclosed in an open, rocky chamber. Ramdas dwelt in Atkhamba for more than a month. Crowds also gathered here in the evenings. Ramkinkar kept him company during nights. Mahadev Prasad did not fail a single evening. Sometimes, Ramdas would go out in the mornings for long walks over hills. On one of the hills he came upon a temple in ruins with its image of a goddess, made of white marble, broken to pieces. From the top of this hill one can have an extensive survey of the country all around. He would spend hours here in the refreshing breeze, in calm meditation.

He also paid visits to an old saint in Shyam Chopla. His childlike nature attracted Ramdas to him. He was fond of narrating the accounts of his wanderings when he was young. He had passed through thrilling experiences. His temple was situated in a jungle far away from the city. Two well-preserved tanks drew many devotees from the city for their daily baths.

Ramdas had the privilege of coming in contact with another saint Nirbhayanandji and his spouse Purnanandji. Both the husband and wife had adopted sannyas and were clad in orange robes—a typical pair who had devoted their life to the service of the Lord. They belonged to the well-known Pilikoti ashram of sannyasis in Chitrakut. At the time of Ramdas' stay in Jhansi, they lived in a small garden-house removed from the city. Both of them were exceedingly kind to him. Mother Purnanandji was really a pure and lovely soul.

In this connection it must here be placed on record that for Ramdas there is none impure or sinful, although he might mention the particular purity and greatness of the persons he came across. His task is merely to chronicle his experiences with regard to events that befell him and to people who came under his observation. He presents the history from the standpoint of a dispassionate witness of God's lila. For, the world is His manifestation in which He expresses Himself in a multitude of forms, assuming various characters. Ramdas looks on all with the same unclouded vision and his love for all is alike, be they saints or sinners. He does not see any difference. It is the Lord who plays all the parts in the world-drama.

An Englishman named Abbot desiring to see Ramdas motored him to his bungalow. Abbot and his aged sister received Ramdas in the verandah. The English mother talked in high admiration of Jesus Christ and his teachings. Ramdas perfectly agreed with her in her laudation of the divine Teacher. But her enthusiasm carried her so far as to speak in contemptuous terms of Sri Krishna, Buddha and others.

"Mother, Ramdas cannot be one with you there," he told her. "He holds Sri Krishna and Buddha in the same high estimation as, if not higher than, Jesus. You are speaking of them as you do, because you have not understood them. Similarly, there are Hindus who speak disparagingly of Christ without knowing him."

The mother combated his view and started attacking it by arguments. But Ramdas remained silent. Abbot did not like the way his sister spoke and tried to pacify her. At last she stopped and Ramdas took leave of them.

Ramkinkar and other friends of Jhansi proposed that Ramdas should be made conversant with Hindi, because many people who came to see him did not understand the English tongue. They felt that they were losing the benefit of his talks. So one of the friends undertook to coach him up in Hindi. Ramdas was provided with the first Hindi primer and a slate and pencil. He felt that he had just been enrolled in the infant class. He received an hour's instruction from the kind teacher every day. His progress was rapid. In ten days he finished the first primer and in five days more, he passed through the second primer. Then he commenced reading books in easy Hindi, such as Bala Ramayan, life of Samarth Ramdas and Gita Sangraha. He also started inditing letters in Hindi.

Ram-navami, the celebration of the birthday of Sri Ramchandra, was fast approaching and Ramdas bethought himself of witnessing the festival in Chitrakut, where they said it was performed on a grand scale. So one day he announced his intention to the Jhansi friends that he was to start by an evening train. Ramkinkar and other friends came to the station to bid him farewell. Ramdas was to travel alone.

CHAPTER XVI

CHITRAKUT

(i) A Bania's Renunciation

Ramkinkar expressed a wish that Ramdas had a companion to take care of him. Hearing this, a bania, who was then on the platform, coming forward said:

"I am also proceeding to Chitrakut. I shall be so happy to keep him company and serve him."

Accordingly, side by side, the bania and Ramdas took seats in the train. The train steamed out of the station. The bania carried a kambal and a lota. He spread the kambal on the bench and making Ramdas lie on it, massaged his feet. While doing this service be opened his mind:

"Maharaj, I am disgusted with worldly life. I too would lead the life of a sadhu. I have turned my back on a life full of cares and sorrows. Consider me as your disciple and take me under your protection."

"Ramji," Ramdas replied, "there is nothing wrong with the world. It is your mind that is obsessed. So long as your mind is not intensely longing to tear up the veil of illusion that clouds the Truth within you, mere external renunciation is of no avail. It will only be a leap out of the frying pan into the fire. True happiness consists in our right attitude towards life and the world. Now right attitude depends on right vision. The vision comes through the realization of Truth or God. Do not be deceived. You cannot have liberation and peace by simply turning your back upon the world. Know your mind well. Freedom and joy are within you. Conquest of lust, wrath and greed is the path. Don't cling to Ramdas. He is no guru.

He can only show you the path. The effort and struggle are your own. Be, therefore, the disciple of Truth."

The bania's mind appeared to have been preoccupied. Ramdas' words did not elicit any reply nor did he evince any sign that he had comprehended them. The night passed. Early next morning the train reached the Chitrakut station. Alighting, Ramdas and the bania moved towards the hills of Chitrakut which lay about three miles from the station. On the way he had again a conversation with the bania.

"Are you doing any sadhana, Ramji, for concentration of mind?" Ramdas asked.

"Why not?" he returned, "I am taking God's Name sometimes."

"Sometimes is no good," Ramdas said, "you ought to repeat the Name ceaselessly, and keep up an unbroken flow of remembrance in your thoughts."

"So far as that is concerned I am all right," he cut short.

"Ramji, leave Ramdas alone. You live your own life, because he wanders alone," Ramdas put in.

"No, no," he said with vehemence, "I am not giving you up."

"The path Ramdas walks is beset with pains and dangers. He is fearless and has no dread of death. To follow him would mean for you so much discomfort and misery," suggested Ramdas.

"I too am not afraid of anything. I can adapt myself to any life you choose to live. I am determined to cast my lot with you," he spoke with great emphasis.

Ramdas had no alternative but to submit. So God willed. Now they reached the banks of the river Mandakini in the heart of the town. They came to a bathing ghat where Ramdas took his seat on a low, worn out table. The fit of vairagya that had seized the bania was at work. He removed his shirt and, calling a passing barber, squatted down on a stone step.

"Shave me clean," he instructed the barber, "I am taking up sannyas."

"You mistake me," remonstrated the barber. "I am not prepared to bring down on my head the curses of your wife and children by helping you adopt sannyas."

"Brother, why do you mind all that? Do as I ask you," the bania pressed coaxingly. "I will give you my shirt and a watch, in addition to the usual shaving charges."

The barber was firm. His fear of the curses outweighed all other considerations. He refused to yield to the temptation. He got up and was about to leave the spot when the bania clutched him by the arm and begged:

"Shave all the hair on my head and face except the eyebrows and a small tuft on the head. What do you say? You can have no objection now."

At this the barber lowered his leather bag of shaving materials and sat down. He agreed to the compromise. In fifteen minutes the bania's face and head, except the tuft in the middle of the latter, were cleared of all hair. He gave away to the barber the shirt and the watch and also some money. Now he turned to Ramdas anticipating a look of approbation from him. Ramdas could only be a cheerful spectator of the performance.

He had now left with him a greasy old cap, which he threw away, two dhoties and a small bag containing some money. On his finger was also a gold ring. One of the dhoties he presented to a beggar. All that he now possessed consisted of one dhoti, a gold ring, some money and a lota.

Bath over, he escorted Ramdas to a neighbouring sweetmeat shop where they had a tiffin of purees and milk. Then they sauntered along the bank of the river and came to a place called Phatakshila, where they saw nearly a dozen sadhus living in a hut close by the river. Resting for some time beneath a tree they retraced their steps to the town again by noon. The bania felt hungry. A recourse again to the sweetmeat shop satisfied the ravenous wolf within.

In the afternoon they went round the famous Kamtanath hill, on which it is said Sri Ramchandra made his abode with Sita for twelve years. In the evening they returned once more to the sweetmeat shop.

For the night Ramdas preferred to settle down beneath a tree and the bania slept beside him. The bania moved with him like his shadow. He was afraid that Ramdas might give him the slip at any moment. On rising next morning from the grassy bed, the bania felt that something was wrong with him.

"We shall go down to Karvi station," he said to Ramdas, "it is only four miles from here, and be back by evening."

It was not for Ramdas now to question why; his was to submit. After a visit to the fascinating tiffin shop they started. On the way, when they were walking through a narrow pass of a hillock, Ramdas had to follow the bania closely. Now a hissing noise and a low moan emanated from him. Ramdas jumped on one side and faced him. He was shedding tears.

"What is the matter?" inquired Ramdas.

Wiping away his tears with many a grief-laden hiccup, he said: "I feel so keenly for my wife and children. I ran away from them without their knowledge. They might be remembering me and living in agony over my absence. For myself I don't mind. It is for them my heart goes out." And he burst into tears.

"Ramji, why don't you then return to them?" asked Ramdas.

"You see I have almost burnt my boats. Oh! the barber was right." Now handling fondly the short pigtail on his head, he continued, "Yes, the prospect is not after all so bad. I may yet go back to them."

(ii) Failure of the Peace Mission

Thus they arrived at Karvi. The bania went directly to the court-yard of a small thatched house near the railway station. Both sat on a bench in the yard, a few steps from the entrance of the house. Two boys were playing in front of it. The bania made several signs to the boys who neither recognized nor heeded him. His transformed appearance was the reason for their non-recognition.

Then he called one of the boys and whispered into his ears: "Tell your mother a man wants to see her."

The boy went in. Meanwhile, the bania confided to Ramdas the secret of his mission. He had come to his wife's sister's house. He wished to reveal himself to her so that through her he might find a means of reconciliation with his wife. It was evident that he had a quarrel with her which ended in his departure from his house with a threat that he would never darken its doorstep again.

The boy returned and unconcernedly commenced his play with his brother. How could a lady condescend to see a stranger inside her house? Again he drew towards the boy and told him in a low voice:

"Tell your mother that her sister Mami's husband has come."

The lad gaped with raised eyebrows at the face of the bania, and a smile lit up his chubby face. He again ran into the house and soon reappeared beckoning the bania to go in. With a happy face the bania now hastened to the house. Ramdas waited. About fifteen minutes—and the bania came out. He looked like a whipped dog. His bitter face told of the unpalatable stuff with which he was served by his sister-in-law! She must have given him a big slice of her mind. The burning lashes of her tongue had charred and wrinkled his face!

"Her tongue cuts—like a razor. Bah! a woman's tongue!" he exclaimed knowingly. Then he added: "Maharaj, I have got it now. I am not fitted for a family life. A sadhu's life has a charm for me. I will never return to my home, there to face another sister! No, never." The resolution made, he continued: "Maharaj, let us be off from this undesirable place."

It was now past midday. The wolf again sorely troubled the bania. He sought a sweetmeat shop and they had a light repast. In spite of his heart having been lacerated with conflicting emotions, his treatment of Ramdas was marked by undiminished respect and kindness. Ramdas could well understand that it was the Lord Himself playing the game. How perfect a player!

When night approached they sought refuge in a dharmasala, but it was so fully crowded that there was no room for them. They came out. The moon was up in the heavens. Its cool and soft rays illumined the retiring world. It flooded the vast railway-yard with its genial effulgence. Ramdas went towards it followed by the bania, and crossing the gate they entered the yard. In the yard were scattered large slabs of stones. Ramdas took his seat on one of them, asking the bania to occupy another which lay by its side.

"This is a fine place to sleep in for the night," Ramdas remarked.

The bania grunted as much as to say that he did not agree with him. He peered suspiciously into the dark spaces below the stones on all sides, but seeing that Ramdas had already laid himself down at full length on his slab, with another long drawn squeak, the bania also followed suit. Ramdas gazed on the bright moon above and the limitless blue space all around. He was charmed and absorbed. Suddenly, an unearthly yell issued from the bania. Ramdas sat up and looked at him. He was shouting out: "A serpent! a serpent!" He had stood up and was shaking his cloth, the only cloth, with feverish agitation.

"Maharaj, this place is infested with snakes. Let us go away from here," he said.

Ramdas had observed that lizards had made the snug nooks below the stone slabs their home.

"There is no fear, Ramji. They are lizards, not snakes, under the stone. They are harmless," Ramdas assured him.

"Oh!" he cried, "the thing, whatever it is, crawled on my legs. What a horrible sensation I got!"

"Never mind, sleep on; there need be no fear," Ramdas said encouragingly.

Finding Ramdas was in no mood to leave the place, he coiled himself on the stone, covering his body fully from head to foot with the cloth. During the night he started in his sleep twice with a cry of fright; the cries were only the after-effects of the first alarm. The first shriek had terrified the poor lizards so much that they dared not come out of their lairs to touch one who could produce such a soul-racking sound!

The bania's peace mission having utterly failed, the next day, they left Karvi again for Chitrakut. Bath in the river over, the favourite tiffin shop entertained them with its purees and milk. The day was hot. They rested for some time in the cool shade of a tree on the river bank. When the sun had descended half way down the heavens, Ramdas proposed that they should go up the hill of Hanumandhara and remain on it for the night.

(iii) Sadhuism is not a Joke

Ascending over a hundred stone steps uphill, they reached the place called Hanumandhara. Here a big jet of water was pouring down from a height of about fifty feet into a reservoir below, made of brick and mortar. There was also a small rest-house near the waterfall. The place is considered sacred because it is said to have been once occupied by Sri Ramchandra and Sita. From here an extensive view of the surrounding country can be had—vast plains, high hills covered with dense vegetation and the smooth running river, are all presented to the gaze of the spectator. Chitrakut is a land of sages and saints. Hundreds of sadhus are still doing penance in their small ashrams called kutis, scattered over and around the hills and the riversides.

From where they stood at the waterfall, Ramdas casting a glance upward, saw the mountain rise still higher. He was about to climb up when the bania suggested:

"Maharaj, there is a neat little rest-house here," pointing to the building, "what if we spend the night there?"

Ramdas without reply, taking to a straggling path, went up, of course, followed by the bania. He now came upon a somewhat level piece of ground where stood two huts and an open shed. He entered one of the huts and found in it an image of black stone dressed in female robes, representing Sita. A sadhu was sitting near the image in order to collect the pice offered to the goddess by the pilgrims. It appears Sita was using the mandir as her kitchen, hence it goes by the name—Sita-rasuyee.

The other hut was locked up. The bania sat inside the open shed to rest his tired limbs. The hill was still higher up by a couple of hundred yards. The whole place was thickly covered with tall wild trees.

"Ramji," Ramdas said to the bania, "this place is best suited for bhajan and so we shall stop here for the night." He replied that the idea did not appeal to him and that the idea was simply preposterous or something to that effect. The sun had set and darkness was rapidly creeping on the world. The sadhu of Sita mandir came out and saw Ramdas seated on the root of a tree and the bania in the tiny shed.

"How, now," the sadhu said, "what are you doing here? Don't you see it is getting dark?—let us go down."

"Ram wills that Ramdas should remain here for the night," answered Ramdas.

"Madness," he muttered, "this jungle is haunted by wild beasts and nobody is permitted to remain here in the open in the night. The shut-up kuti belongs to my guru who has gone down to the city for riddhi siddhi. It is his order that none should be here in the night."

"Ramdas obeys the command of Ram who says that he should not move from here," Ramdas rejoined.

"Then, do as you like at your own risk," the sadhu retorted. "But one thing," he added, "don't make use of that shed. You, you," turning to the bania, "get out of the shed." The bania came out.

With a last warning the sadhu left the place and went down-hill. About ten yards higher up from the shed, Ramdas saw a flat stone beneath a cluster of trees. Going up, he occupied it. No sooner had the sadhu gone out of sight than the bania got back to the seat in the shed. Darkness came on.

"Maharaj-ji, please do come to the shed," the bania called.

"No, Ramji,—this flat stone is large enough to accommodate two persons. So you may also come here," answered Ramdas.

"This is a better place, maharaj," he urged.

By now it became pitch dark. The bania cried out in terror: "O maharaj, do come, I cannot remain here alone in this dreadful place."

Ramdas abandoning the flat stone went up to him in the shed. With the advent of darkness cold had also set in. The shed, open on all sides, being supported on four bamboo poles, allowed freely the chill breezes to sweep into it. Ramdas sat up while the bania lay down to sleep. But where was sleep for him in that fearful place? He was shivering both from dread and cold. At midnight there was a rustling noise among the thickly strewn dry leaves beneath the trees. Hearing the noise, with a sharp cry the bania bounded into a sitting posture.

"Maharaj," he whispered, "what is that noise?"

"It is nothing, Ramji," consoled Ramdas, "it may be only mountain rats, sporting about."

"For all that we know, it might be a wild animal or a cobra. I have heard that these jungles are inhabited by large sized cobras," he spoke with deep concern.

"Give up your fears, Ramji, they may be rats," assured Ramdas.

Again an hour later, a similar noise louder and closer was heard. This time the bania was thoroughly frightened, and clung to Ramdas as the scared young one of a monkey does its mother.

"What shall we do?" he cried.

"Repeat the Name of Ram," Ramdas suggested, "you need not be afraid of anything when that powerful Name is on your lips. Do repeat it and keep calm."

Thereafter, Ramnam worked on his lips with amazing continuity. Till the appearance of dawn he went on with the japa, and no more noises disturbed him. The day-break dispelled his fears. He lay down through utter exhaustion from want of sleep, and directly commenced to snore.

Ramdas got up from the place, and wandering in the jungle, came to the top of the hill. Through the morning mist he beheld the distant landscapes and the faint outlines of the turrets and domes of the temples of Chitrakut. The sight was enchanting and Ramdas stood still for some minutes under its magic spell. He roamed deeper into the forest where he discovered at places dry bones of animals scattered on the ground, the tell-tale signs of the work of wild beasts.

Remembering the bania he hastened to the spot where he had left him. But where was the bania? He had vanished. When Ramdas was looking for him, the sadhu who had come up inquired: "Whom are you seeking for?—the bania! When I was coming up I saw him running down as though pursued by a devil." He added with a laugh: "After all he learnt that sadhuism is not a joke."

The jungle called Ramdas back again and he rambled freely through it, till about eleven o'clock when he descended the hill and directed his steps towards the river.

CHAPTER XVII

CHITRAKUT (Contd.)

(i) The Naked Mouni

When bathing in the river a tall and dark sadhu informed Ramdas of a place called Anasuyaji, seven miles from Chitrakut. He had thought of visiting the shrine that day and would be glad to have Ramdas as his companion. Ramdas fell in with his proposal. God always arranges things for him. He took Ramdas to the sadhu-ashram of Phatakshila where he had dinner in the company of about two dozen sadhus.

An incident here is worthy of note. For want of room inside the small ashram, Ramdas had to sit for his meal in the outer verandah. The forests of Chitrakut were teeming with monkeys. The moment a plate containing roties, rice and dal was placed before Ramdas, a stout and powerful monkey coming from behind, with one sudden grab, carried off one roti and some rice. At this the sadhu, serving food, looking at Ramdas, angrily said:

"Why did you allow the monkey to snatch away the roti? —dullard!"

"Never mind, maharaj, he has taken Hanuman's share. Is he not Hanuman?" said Ramdas with a smile.

In response the sadhu intently looked at Ramdas and remained silent.

The meal over, along with the dark sadhu and also with two others who made up the party, Ramdas set out for Anasuyaji. They had to pass through an extensive forest of giant trees. When they entered the depths of the forest they could discern footmarks of wild beasts on their track. Presently, they neared a small thatched hut of a sadhu who was hewing wood for his night fire. For a few minutes, the party rested. beside the ashram and drank the cool water provided by the sadhu. He was an old man with a grey beard, bright, hale and cheerful. He spoke of wild beasts as though they were domestic animals.

The party proceeding onwards reached Anasuyaji before sunset. Anasuyaji was an awe-inspiring place. It was a narrow strip of the jungle by the side of the river, having in the back-ground tall, rugged, wierd-looking crags. Facing the river stood a terraced building in which the resident sadhus lived, and at some distance, almost hidden in the dense grove of trees, was the temple of Anasuyaji—the celebrated pativrata, wife of the great sage Atrimuni. Here again the image was of black marble, dressed gaudily in feminine robes, after the North Indian fashion.

After slaking their thirst at the river—here the water of the brook was of transparent purity—the party rested beneath a huge tree in front of the terraced house. Night was approaching and along with it also cold. The sadhus went in search of firewood to light a fire for the night.

While Ramdas was sitting alone under the tree he heard the clapping of hands from the direction of the terrace. A sadhu beckoned to him. Ascending a flight of steps Ramdas reached the terrace and approached the sadhu who had called him. The sadhu was stark naked. He made signs to Ramdas to sit down on a rough kambal which he spread on the floor. Ramdas took the seat and he also sat down. The sadhu was a young man but his body was lean and withered by severe austerities. His unkempt hair and beard showed his utter indifference to physical appearance. His looks were distant and dreamy and there was a subtle glow on his brown face. As he expressed himself in signs, it was clear that he was also observing the vow of silence. He had in his hand a short japa-mala of rudraksha beads which he kept rotating between his fingers.

By signs he made Ramdas understand that he should remain with him for the night. He took Ramdas inside the room which he found in a state of perfect disorder. He prepared a seat for Ramdas beside the fire which burnt in the centre of the room. In silence he spent the night in the sadhu's company.

Early next day he asked the sadhu's permission to leave the place. He questioned Ramdas by gestures why he did not carry any water-vessel. Ramdas replied it was Rama's will. Out of the debris that lay scattered in his room, he ferreted out a neat little gourd, fashioned into a portable water-pot. He placed the gourd before Ramdas and signed that he should take it. He demurred, but the sadhu was not to be foiled. His emphatic gesticulations denoted that Ramdas should never go without a water-pot. Ramdas at last submitted and took the gourd and bidding him adieu left the place.

Coming down he joined the dark sadhu who was waiting for him. The other sadhus had left earlier. Ramdas and the dark sadhu proceeded towards Bharat Coop. On the way they came across the huts of cultivators. Here they were entertained by the poor humble villagers with a meal of rice and curds. In the evening they reached Bharat Coop.

Here was a large well with the branches of an ancient and gigantic peepal tree hanging over it. Close by, there were temples of Rama, Sita, Lakshman, Bharat and Hanuman. They settled for the night beneath the trees on the platform around the well. Next morning, after a bath from the well water, they started again. Now the dark sadhu parted from him.

Left alone, Ramdas roamed wildly in the jungles for three days, stopping in the nights either in the ruins or under the trees, and subsisting on mowah flowers, picked up from beneath the trees. Mowah is a white flower, shaped like the rose bud with thick juicy petals and is sweet to the taste.

Ramdas had come to Chitrakut a week before the Ramnavami celebrations. There were yet two days more for the festival. As he wandered he again came on the parikrama or the path round the Kamtanath hill. On this path, at some distance from each other, were temples, ashrams and tanks. While going on a round, it was nearing midday, when two devout mothers living in the out-house of a temple invited Ramdas and fed him with great love.

One evening he climbed the hill called Lakshman Tekri, He spent a night there in a solitary spot.

(ii) God is for him who thirsts for Truth

Along the parikrama was a Brahmachari ashram where a dozen young boys were imparted tuition in the Vedic lore and trained to observe the discipline and ritual of the ancient days. In front of the ashram was set up a yajna kund where the Brahmacharis assembled every day with their preceptor, and performed yajna in accordance with the Vedic rites, accompanied by the incantation of mantras. Besides the yajna kund, there were also small structures, artistic pieces of Indian architecture facing the ashram. In one of these Ramdas passed a night.

In the course of the rounds of the hill he had come upon a mad looking sadhaka—truly God-intoxicated men are in a sense mad—uttering Ramnam aloud ceaselessly, at one time sitting outside the small temples on the parikrama and at another walking round.

One night Ramdas took his position on the raised pedestal around the yajna kund for his meditation. Here, he was joined by this sadhaka who also settled on it beside him. While Ramdas was reciting Ramnam in an undertone, he was as usual taking the Name aloud. Hour after hour passed. They went on with the japa. It might have been past three o'clock. Sleep overpowered the sadhaka, and he rolled down on his seat and slept.

Half an hour had not passed when he started up with a cry and beheld Ramdas sitting and going on with his japa. He became perfectly wild with rage with himself, and spoke with bitterness and deep contrition:

"Wretched fool that I am! I allowed sleep to deprive me of bhajan. Look, he is still awake. What a control he has on sleep!" referring to Ramdas. "I understand now, it was the food that I ate in the evening that was responsible for this lapse. Oh! I am losing precious time!"

Verily, God is for him who is seized with such a burning thirst for Truth.

Ram-navami celebrations usually continue for nine days. The first day came, and thousands of pilgrims from various parts of India streamed into Chitrakut for parikrama or walking round the Kamtanath hill—on which Sri Ramchandra and Sita performed tapas—which was considered by the devotees to possess high spiritual merit. So thick crowds of pilgrims tramped round the sacred hill.

In the course of his walks on this path Ramdas had noted the Pilikoti ashram to which were related Swami Nirbhayanand and his wife, the saintly pair he met in Jhansi. He found the ashram decorated with festoons, flags and shamianas, and hundreds of sannyasis who were attracted from several places of India assembled within its precincts. The motto of the ashram was to serve with food any sannyasi who happened to visit it. The head of the ashram was Swami Akhandanand, a famous sannyasi of the United Provinces. His disciple Swami Satchidanand, a Sanskrit scholar, was the manager of the institution. The ashram had also attached to it a small free Sankrit pathashala for boys.

Swami Nirbhayanand, his wife and a brother of his, Swami Ramanand, who was at the time in the ashram, were also disciples of Swami Akhandanand who had a large following both among the sannyasis and the householders. He and his sannyasi disciples in their itinerant life, in certain seasons, lived for some period in Jhansi. They had heard of Ramdas from Ramkinkar but had no occasion to see him.

Swami Nirbhayanand had asked Ramdas, when starting from Jhansi, not to fail to visit the Pilikoti ashram. Now Ramdas, entering the grounds of the ashram, mingled with the throng of sannyasis. At midday he joined with them in their feast. In the afternoon, taking a walk around the hill, he returned to the ashram in the evening. He occupied for the night a stone bench—a number of such benches had been erected in the yard. The peculiarity with them was that the upper slab was fitted on to the uprights at a slight angle, so as to keep one's head at a higher level when one reclined on it at full length. In the nights these slabs were cold as ice.

As night advanced Ramdas, wanting to rest, covered himself with a part of the only cloth he had, the other part of which being spread on the bench and he lay down. In those days he had very little sleep. An hour later, a young sannyasi who had come with two blankets drew his attention. "Maharaj, have these kambals; the cold is bitter." By his urging Ramdas vacated the bench and the sannyasi spread a blanket on the slab and, after he rested on it, covered him with the other. Everybody is kind to him because everyone is He.

Next day, at daybreak, he went to the river for a bath. The gourd had now become his companion. He came back to the ashram by midday. In the evening the young sannyasi who had provided him with blankets the previous night, seeking his society, took him to his kuti which stood on the opposite side of the road. Ramdas spoke to him of his meeting with Swami Nirbhayanand and his wife at Jhansi. Then he inquired of Ramdas'. name. He gave it.

The night passed. The following day, early as usual, he went to the river for bath and reappeared by noon at the ashram. In the front verandah of a small outhouse a number of sannyasis had assembled. As he entered the compound they were to a man gazing deliberately at him and giggling! He was about to walk past them when Swami Satchidananda, the manager of the institution, cried halt.

"Come here," he accosted, beckoning Ramdas into the verandah. He got in.

"We have been contemplating upon the nature of the punishment to be meted out to you," the Swami continued.

One of the saints was holding a stout cane. Smiling, Ramdas took the stick from its owner and offering it to the Swami said:

"Here is a stick. Punish Ramdas to your heart's content," and bending down, presented his back for the treatment. All laughed.

"Not that," explained the Swami, "we have hit it all right. You have to stay in this Ashram for one full year. This is the punishment!"

"If Ram does not will it so?" asked Ramdas quietly.

"It is Ram who speaks through us," he rejoined.

"Ram speaks also in Ramdas. He says Ramdas should not agree to your proposal," said Ramdas.

"We shall see about it. We are putting you in a separate room and one of us will mount guard on you. You cannot escape us," he said, shaking his head.

"Ram's will be done," Ramdas replied.

"Now, have you any idea of the charge against you?" he questioned.

"You have already pronounced the judgment. What does it matter whether Ramdas knows or not what the charge is?" answered Ramdas.

"However, I am telling you what it is," he went on: "you have outwitted us for two days. You were with us perfectly incognito. We had heard of you and wished greatly to see you. Hence the punishment for your deception."

(iii) The test of Self-surrender

A narrow room was got ready for Ramdas in which he found a wooden cot with a quilt on it, and an earthen pot filled with water. He was handed over to the charge of Swami Ramanand, an old sannyasi, who attended to his needs. The childlike nature of the sannyasis in this ashram was wonderful. They would frequently come to Ramdas in the room, talk to him and also fondle him, as if he were a child! Here Ramdas had quite a feast of love.

One day, Swami Ramanand and Swami Guptanand, the young sannyasi who had supplied Ramdas with blankets on the first night, were seated on the cot beside him. Ramdas spoke upon self-surrender. As an instance, he narrated the episode of Draupadi's predicament when Duhsasana sought to disgrace her in the durbar hall of the Kauravas. So long as she was crying to Sri Krishna for help, and at the same time struggling to protect herself, the Lord did not come to the rescue. At last, realising her folly, she lifted up her hands in absolute surrender and called Krishna, and that moment He saved her.

When Ramdas came to mention about Draupadi's self-surrender in the narration, Swami Guptanand who was listening with great concentration was so overpowered with emotion that he burst into tears. Also Swami Ramanand's eyes moistened.

In Guptanand's company Ramdas, one day, ascended the famous Kamtanath hill which stood in front of the Pilikoti ashram. Some Hindus consider it a sacrilege to tread on the hill which is held sacred, because Sri Ramchandra and Sitadevi are said to have resided on it in the ancient days. The hill is about five hundred feet above its base. There are no structures or any relics of them on the hill. It is covered with wild shrubs and trees of which a certain species bore edible fruits called thendu. While descending, Ramdas ran down a dry water-course, sprinkled with smooth and rounded boulders.

Another day, a sannyasi from Kashi took Ramdas out for a walk round the famous hill. On going some distance both sat on a raised stone platform beneath a tree. Here the sannyasi confided to Ramdas his condition.

"Maharaj," he said, "I have been for nearly thirty years in this line of sannyas, but still my mind is perfectly hopeless. Lust, greed and wrath are as rampant in it as ever. What shall I do?"

"The only way to control the mind and free it from the evils you mention is always to take the Name of God, meditate upon His great attributes and surrender all your actions to Him," Ramdas replied suggestively.

"I have done all that and I have failed," he said.

"You ought to practise in solitude," Ramdas put in.

"Oh!" he cried out, "don't speak of solitude. I have a terror for solitude. When I am left alone, my mind goes into a whirl of most unholy desires. So I am running after saints. In their society I have peace. But I know, I should not solely depend upon external aids for attaining peace, as such peace cannot be permanent." He stopped and looked at Ramdas for the solution of his problem.

"What you say is right," Ramdas now spoke at length: "God, who is absolute existence, consciousness and bliss, is within you—nay, you and He are not different. Unless you realize Him there can be no true liberation and lasting peace. Please note that the first qualification necessary for the seeker of God is fearlessness. Neither the terror of solitude nor the terror of the crowd should daunt you. But solitude is a great help. Know that God, who dwells in you, is almighty. Seek His assistance by constant remembrance, meditation and prayer. Then the mind is bound to come under control. The evil passions must depart from it.

"Forget not the central truth that God is seated in your own heart. Don't be disheartened by failures at initial stages. Cultivate the spirit of surrender to the workings of His will in you and outside you until you have completely surrendered up your ego-sense, and have known He is in all and He is all, and you and He are one. Be patient. The path of self-discipline that leads to God-realization is not an easy path. Obstacles and sufferings are on the path; the latter you must bear and the former ovecome,—all by His help. His help comes only through concentration. Repetition of God's Name helps concentration."

The sannyasi heard Ramdas silently and put no more questions. They retraced their steps to the ashram.

(iv) Ramdas is a Child of God

A few days later, the same sannyasi came to Ramdas and asked:

"Don't you know? The great Swami Akhandanandji is here. Have you see him?"

"To see you is to see him," Ramdas simply replied.

"No, maharaj, you ought to see him," he said with a serious look. "He is only a few yards from the ashram, seated beneath a grove of trees. He aways prefers to stay in jungles and does not like to reside beneath a roof. He is a famous mahatma. He is going away tomorrow morning. If you don't have his darshan today, you will lose a golden opportunity."

"For Ramdas God is everywhere. He need not go specially anywhere to see Him," Ramdas answered.

"What!" he exclaimed with surprise. "You don't want to see him? You shall go to him," he added emphatically, and taking hold of Ramdas' arm almost dragged him.

"Come, I am also going with you." He was a strong man and Ramdas did not resist.

A few minutes' walk brought them to a large assembly of sannyasis, seated beneath the shade of about half a dozen tall, spreading trees. On a cot against a tree sat a sannyasi with only a loin cloth or kaupin on, while all the rest were seated on the ground.

Ramdas went directly to the Swamiji and placed his head at his feet and sat down on the ground near the cot. Now a stillness seemed to have settled on the gathering. All was silent for a few minutes. The Swamiji broke the ice.

He said to a householder devotee sitting beside Ramdas:

"Ask him if he has any doubts to clear." The Swamiji spoke in Hindi. The devotee was an English educated man. He interpreted the Swamiji's question to Ramdas in English. Ramdas' knowledge of Hindi was yet poor. So, he, of course, replied in English.

"Ramdas is a child of God, and He has long ago removed all doubts of His child." The devotee conveyed to the Swamiji in Hindi what Ramdas said.

"What is his position then?" came the next question from the Swamiji.

"His position is this," Ramdas replied, "he is like the river Ganges which, having reached the ocean and become one with it, still continues running towards it."

When the Swamiji and others heard the reply, a titter went round the congregation. The Swamiji remained silent.

Then the devotee on his own part put a poser:

"What brought you here then?"—a significant question!

"Ramdas came, simply because Ram dragged him here," was the answer, and he looked at the sannyasi escort and smiled.

"What is it?" the Swamiji asked the devotee inquisitively. The devotee explained, and there arose a loud roar of laughter from the assembly.

Then Ramdas suddenly jumped up, and bowing again to the Swamiji ran a race to his room of the outhouse which he reached in less than a minute.

Swami Ramanand was a simple and kind soul. He looked after Ramdas with great tenderness. He counted on Ramdas' stay in the ashram for a pretty long time. In his own way he was watchful. Ramdas knew that to leave the place with his knowledge was out of question. Ram was bidding him to decamp—but how?

Ram provided the opportunity one day. The sun was unusually hot. At midday, some of the elderly sannyasis would have their forty winks. But this particular day the heat of the sun laid prostrate both the young and the old. The outhouse, at about one in the afternoon, resounded with a variety of snores! Swami Ramanand led the chorus.

Ramdas, who was all alive and active, taking the gourd pot in hand, slowly slipped out of the compound on tiptoe. He reached the road making the least possible noise—the sannyasis never the wiser. Once on the road, he started on a trot which soon developed into a downright gallop! He ran for a mile and then walked at a brisk pace.

CHAPTER XVIII

TOWARDS BANDA—BANDA

(i) The water—Nectar of pure Love

Ramdas had no idea of any destination and did not care which way he walked. He found himself again in Karvi by evening. Early next morning he was proceeding along the railway lines, treading on the bed of sharp-edged granite bits near the rails. On covering a mile or thereabouts, he came to a level crossing where the railway gate-keeper seeing him, said in a sharp voice:

"What is the matter with you? Are you mad? Don't you feel that you are walking on sharp-pointed stones?" Pointing to a road, he added: "Take to that; the road goes straight to Banda."

Following the gate-keeper's suggestion, he moved on to the road and continued his journey. At noon he reached a small village, having on the roadside a few shops. A shop-keeper invited him to his shop. He got in and sat down on a mat. The first thing his eyes fell on, as he entered, was a framed picture of Kali on the wall, decorated with a flower garland. A number of customers were seated in front of him, sipping a clear, transparent liquid from small tin cups. The strong odour was suggestive of liquor. So he was in a liquor shop! It dealt also in ganja, for on another side a man having purchased the stuff was preparing a smoke.

The shopkeeper also prepared a chilam of ganja, and lighting it, offered it to Ramdas. It was taken for granted every sadhu smoked ganja! He was not used to chilam or the country pipe. He apprised the dealer of the fact and begged to be excused.

"I will teach you how to manipulate the chilam," he said in a kind tone. In a trice Ramdas was trained. He had a few puffs at the pipe.

An hour later, the kind shop-keeper provided him with a meal. At about three o'clock he left the village and continued the journey. At dusk he gained a small hamlet. On the roadside, below the trees, was an enclosure made of high stone benches. He got a perch upon one of them.

Usually one meal a day sufficed him. He had no craving for food in the night. But today he had a distinct feeling of hunger. The ganja smoke, although it did not affect him in any other way, created this feeling. He spoke of it. To whom could he do so but to Ram?

Five minutes had not elapsed when a lad of about fourteen ran towards him and, leaping on the slab on which he was sitting, drew close to him, and said:

"I want to give you a meal. What would you have?"

"Rice and milk," Ramdas replied.

Ramdas was not surprised at his offer. His life had been replete with a series of such surprises. Ram's nursing hand was visible to him everywhere. The lad disappeared and returned two hours later. He escorted Ramdas to his cottage, and his kind mother served him with rice and milk. On finishing the meal he regained the seat on the stone slab.

Night passed. Next day he continued his journey. It was midday. The still air was burning hot. He went bare-footed and bare-headed. For him suffering was joy. His supreme indifference to physical comforts had transformed every emotion of his into ecstasy. Thus bathing in the burning glory of the sun he walked on. Now a passing cartman accosted him:

"Maharaj, the sun is hot. On your left, a furlong away in the fields, there is a small ashram of sadhu Ramdasji. Go there."

Ramdas, turning to the direction pointed by the cartman, made for the ashram. Here he met a very old sadhu. He was kind and affable. Ramdas had a bath at the well, a simple meal and rest for an hour on a shaky bench. Again he marched on. At sunset he found himself in the midst of a jungle. He always felt a peculiar feeling of exaltation when he was alone in the jungles at night. He repaired to a place beneath a large tree for spending the night. He laid himself down on the rough ground. In less than five minutes, he had a shower of bird's drippings from the branches of the tree. Then he moved into the open and reclined on the soft grass.

The moon was up. Its cool rays illumined the forest. The light filtering through the leaves and branches of the trees formed on the ground below beautiful spangled designs, and the forest seemed as it were covered with a multi-patterned carpet. The air was cool and a soft breeze was blowing. The silence of the night was broken now and then by the flapping of the huge bats that flew from tree to tree and the distant hoots of owls who were holding their nocturnal discourses. The night passed in wakefulness and bliss.

Next day, again at midday, he was stopped on the road by another cartman who directed him to a temple close by. He said that Ramdas would do well to have the darshan of a sadhu named Kamtanath who resided in the temple. The time was about one o'clock, afternoon. The temple was about fifty yards from the road. He entered the temple. Everything was still within. There was none inside except a sadhu snoring on a cot. He quietly took a seat, a little away from the sadhu. The sadhu awoke with a start and his eyes fell on Ramdas.

Beckoning Ramdas towards him, he rubbed off with his cloth the perspiration streaming down Ramdas' face and arms.

"I have no food to offer you," he said with a smiling face, "you have to be content now with mere water. In the night you shall have a good meal."

Ramdas laughed and replied:

"Mere water will do, maharaj."

"Go and have your bath," he said next.

Ramdas finished his bath at the well and returned. The sadhu then, taking him by the arm, led him towards the main room of the temple where gaudily decorated images of God were kept. Then leading him to the narrow passage, he made him sit on a mat. Going into an inner room he brought a bowl of dal and a thick roti. Sitting down beside Ramdas he mixed the roti in the dal curry and suddenly thrust a lump of it into his mouth. Ram, indeed, has his own unique ways of feeding Ramdas! As he swallowed, he forced lumps of food into his mouth one ofter another, until he was overfilled. Coming out they sat on the cot, his arm round Ramdas' neck. He was simply gushing with love.

"You shall stay here for some days. Won't you?" he asked.

"No, maharaj, Ramdas is starting presently," answered Ramdas in an appealing tone.

"I am not allowing you to go. I want you to be with me for at least four or five days," he said compressing his lips.

To argue with him seemed to be useless. So Ramdas remained silent.

"You see the sun is still hot; have a nap," he said, and lying at full length on the cot fell asleep.

Ramdas waited for some minutes and, finding that the sadhu had fallen asleep, slowly got up and walked out of the temple on tiptoe—as he did at the Pilikoti ashram. As soon as he came out on the bypath, he ran at full speed until he gained the main road. A few miles ahead he came across a bullock-cart. At the sight of him a man jumped out of the cart and drawing near him pleaded:

"Maharaj, do take a seat in my cart. I cannot bear to see you walking on the burning ground in the hot sun."

Ramdas told him that he was on his way to Banda and his course lay in the opposite direction.

"Then, here, please take this money; it is only one anna and a half—the railway fare from the station just a few yards from here to Banda. A train is due in a few minutes. Do catch it." He forced the coins on Ramdas.

Ramdas proceeded to the small station. On enquiry he was told that the fare was two annas. He came out of the station and continued his travel on foot. Before sunset he reached the outskirts of Banda. Here a woman on the road-side had, beneath a tree, a small thatched hut in which she stored drinking water in big earthen pots. She freely distributed the water to thirsty travellers who happened to pass that way.

When she saw Ramdas, she called out: "Mahatmaji, mahatmaji, come here; have some rest in my humble shed." He responded to her call.

The kind mother made him sit on a bench and washed his feet and legs up to the knee with cool water from the pots. He also drank the water she offered. It was the nectar of pure love!

(ii) The Militant Sadhu

Ramdas was passing through the crowded streets of Banda. when a merchant from his shop called him and said:

"Maharaj, only a short distance from the town, in a secluded place, resides a sadhu by name Vishuddhanand. The place is called Budh Ram Kuva. He is a pure saint, go to him." He pointed the way through a by-lane.

Ramdas walked in the direction indicated by the merchant, but as he proceeded, in the network of streets, he lost the way. He asked a passerby who said that he would escort Ramdas to the spot. Ramdas followed him. They came to a temple of Mahadev at the foot of a hill, and passing through a high porch ascended the hill. They had to climb a few yards on all fours and come to a flat surface in front of a large shallow cave. A number of people were sitting on the ground. A sadhu, a young man in kaupin, was standing inspecting the construction of dhuni or fire-pit at the mouth of the cave.

Seeing Ramdas he offered an empty gunny bag for a seat, on which he sat. Now the sadhu's attention was drawn to a man in the assembly. Flying into a temper he roundly abused the man in coarse language. Ramdas enquired of the escort if the angry sadhu was Vishuddhanand.

"No," he replied, "this is Balak Ram Paramhams. Vishuddhanand stays about a mile away from here."

"Can you take Ramdas to him?" Ramdas asked.

"Very well," he answered.

The latter part of this dialogue reached the ears of the irate sadhu. It tended only to fan the flame. He now emptied the vials of his wrath on Ramdas' escort.

"What?—you are going to take the sadhu away. Get away from here, you fool; leave this instant," and he raised his right leg towards him for a kick. The frightened escort ran down the hill and disappeared.

"Maharaj," the sadhu said turning to Ramdas, "do remain here; I shall see that all your wants are met."

Ramdas submitted, but made him understand that his wants were few and that he would prefer to live there on mere milk diet. A merchant named seth Moolchand furnished the sadhu with food twice a day. A small boy was employed for fetching the meals. Night came on; the crowd dispersed. About an hour later, the boy turned up with the meal as usual. The sadhu had another guest who now issued from a hole on the left side of the large open cave.

"Tapaswiji, hurry on; dinner has arrived," said the sadhu, Balak Ram.

Tapaswiji was a man of about thirty-five with a stout and well-built body, besmeared with a thick layer of ashes. He had a stout coir rope round his waist and wore only a kaupin. His matted hair was coiled up into a crown on his head. He held in one hand a yogadanda or arms-rester like a cross, and in the other a japa-mala of rudraksha beads.

They sat down for the meal and asked Ramdas to join them. He excused himself. Balak Ram tried to persuade the boy to fetch some milk for Ramdas. He demurred and said that he did not know where to get milk from.

"Never mind," put in Ramdas, "Ramdas is not hungry: he will be satisfied with a tumbler of water for the night."

The meal over, the sadhus prepared ganja chilam and Balak Ram appealed to Ramdas to share with them a smoke. Here again he declined their effort with thanks. He was silent and watchful. The ganja intoxication made the sadhus drift into strange and irrelevant talks.

Ramdas stopped on the hill for about a fortnight and the short stay was crowded with thrilling and amusing incidents. The hill was called Bambeshwar Pahad. Except for a sprinkling of shrubs and two or three trees, the hill was arid and rocky. So there was scarcity of water on Bambeshwar Pahad. Water had to be carried up from the temple well down below.

Balak Ram Paramhams was a young man aged about thirty-two possessing a lithe and upright figure. His lower jaw and the compressed lips showed determination. His eyes were tender and his face was suffused with smiles when he was not in fits of temper, which would sweep over him as the raging tempests, only to be followed by calmness and a clear sky. At heart, Ramdas could discern, he was soft and compassionate. For lack of proper discipline and society he had a mind riotous and uncontrolled. He had a recoil from the unrealities of the world and his dispassion was admirable. The only method he employed to subdue the cravings of the mind was ganja smoking, but the stuff would only raise the very spirit of wrath in him. One predominant trait in him was a passion to serve saints. By such service alone, he firmly believed, one would attain liberation or moksha. His one message to all those who came to him was to use their wealth for the service of sadhus. His ambition was to make the hill a home of sadhus and for himself to be their servant, and the worldly people the suppliers of the necessaries for such service.

He was militant in his ways with the visitors, and with the whip of his tongue he would lash them. A specimen of the manner in which he talked to them will be related here. One day, it appears, he sent for the Deputy Collector of the district who was in Banda at the time. He was a Hindu. The poor officer, having a religious turn of mind, not knowing what was in store for him, obeyed the call of the mahatma. He came to see Balak Ram at the close of his office, in his usual office dress. The officer bowed to Balak Ram and sat down.

Now Balak Ram, taking a full survey of the man in front of him, rolled out his tongue to lubricate it. He was gifted with eloquence combined with vehemence so that he could reduce his adversary to pulp.

"Ha, ha," he began derisively, "what a fine pheta you do wear!—a well-ironed long coat, clean white trousers, superior English boots and a fashionable cane into the bargain. Luxurious dandy that you are! How much precious money are you wasting on these foppish things? You think you are very clever because you have these adornments. Fool, do you still believe in wallowing in dirt like the filthy worm, toiling and moiling from morn to eve to procure these baubles and steep yourself in the enjoyment of selfish and sinful desires?"

"Beware," he continued: "death like a huge cobra is ever stalking behind you, waiting at any moment to swallow you up. Have some thought about what you are here for. The only way for you, mud-worms, to attain salvation is service of the saints. If you don't do this, you are done for. If you have any money about you, shell it out."

The dazed and perplexed officer said that he would send some money on reaching home, and mumbling some excuse sneaked away. The money never came. Thereafter Balak Ram sent for him half a dozen times. The officer did not, of course, turn up!

(iii) The Way to Peace

School boys have a fascination for sadhus and mahatmas. They can have good fun in their company. They watch and then imitate the curious antics of the sadhu-world. The whims, caprices and eccentricities of this race of religious mendicants are for ever a matter for close observation on the part of the youngsters. Because here they witness a delectable show without payment of any fee. Not so with Balak Ram. No doubt he had a great love for boys, but they had to pay dearly for both the show and the love he bore for them. When the school hours were over, a company of boys would crawl up the

Bambeshwar hill. Now Balak Ram had with him a dozen well-sized earthen water pots handy.

"Sonnies, O dears," he would call them. He had the trick of forming his thin lips into the shape of a flattened funnel to show his endearment. "Will you not get me some water from the well below? Here are the pots, one each—clever fellows—you can do it in a twinkling; yes, dears."

Such were his insinuating and coaxing ways! Once Ramdas was the spectator of an incident like this. A batch of six boys was egged on to fetch the water and were provided with pots. Of this batch two boys could alone come up safe with the pots, while the others carried with them either the broken necks or bottoms of the pots. At the loss of four pots in one experiment Balak Ram's monkey was up. His smiles disappeared and, looking sternly at the four delinquents, he bellowed forth:

"Do you think—you rogues—that the pots belonged to your grandfathers! I paid hard cash for them. You broke them, careless imps! Go immediately to your parents and get me one anna and a half each. Run away, quick. You must be back with money by nightfall."

The boys skulked away never to show their faces again! Another day a fresh batch came and the same story was repeated.

Balak Ram was worrying for some days over a certain overseer who had yielded up a couple of rupees at his first onslaught of abuse, just as in India a milch buffalo does not yield milk unless beaten on the back by the stalk of the plantain tree. He was keen on giving a second trial to the overseer, but the overseer knew better. Every messenger sent by Balak Ram returned to report that he was not to be found. So far as Balak Ram was concerned, the Deputy Collector had proved an utter failure—no scent of him again!

One night Ramdas asked him why he treated the visitors with harsh abuse, and he replied with a sniff of contempt:

"You see, sweet words and arguments are not for donkeys. They need a stout stick to make them work. So with these selfish and ignorance-ridden folk. I mean well of them; their hide needs hammer blows to awaken them."

"You are mistaken," Ramdas then told him, "there is no power on earth greater than love.. By mildness and gentleness you can conquer the world. You are out as a sadhu to know God. God is love and peace. An abusive tongue and a mind filled with wrath are signs of ignorance. Until love, compassion and forgiveness dwell in your heart and perfect peace in your mind, you cannot realise God."

"Oh! how your words heal me; make me a better man," he cried out passionately. "I know I am full of defects. I wanted you to remain with me only for this reason. I wish earnestly to be benefitted by your society."

Now the Tapaswiji drew his attention to the fresh-lit chilam of ganja. The conversation broke off.

Ramdas made him understand on several occasions, when he was using harsh language with the visitors, that he would prefer bidding him goodbye to remaining with him to hear his abuse. He was averse to losing Ramdas. He loved and adored him. Many a time he curbed his tongue lest Ramdas should slip away from him.

Things nearly approached a climax one night. Balak-Ram had kept a rupee in some crevice within the small cave. That afternoon he looked for the coin but could not find it. The boy, the food carrier, used to sweep the floor of the cave. Suspicion fell on him. The boy was absent. Balak Ram fumed with rage.

"Let the boy come. I shall take proper account of him—

the blackguard!" he rang out.

As usual, at about eight o'clock, the boy came with the night meal. The moment he lowered to the floor the vessel of food, Balak Ram caught hold of the boy's arm in a firm grip and shouted: "You thief, where is my rupee?"

Looking at Balak Ram's fiery red eyes and menacing tone, the boy trembled. "I do not know, I have not taken it," replied he in a whining voice.

"Liar!" roared Balak Ram, "having committed the theft, you dare to tell a lie on the top of it. You are not fit to live; if you are allowed to, you will turn into a regular budmash. I shall presently strangle you to death." Suiting action to his words, with a murderous fury, he closed his fingers on the boy's throat.

At once Ramdas going forward told him: "Look here, Ram, Ramdas is off. He cannot any longer remain with you." He suddenly jumped past a rock in order to go down the hill.

Balak Ram releasing his hold on the boy's throat ran after Ramdas and falling at his feet said: "Forgive, forgive me; I forgot myself. I shall never harm the boy; do return."

Ramdas returned. That night also he had a plain talk with him.

"You must control your temper, Ramji," Ramdas said, "and not allow it to run amuck as you did a little while ago. In your rage you would have killed the poor boy. You think you are trying to mend the ways of others while your own are not straight. Have you heard the saying: 'Physician, heal thyself?' This very appropriately applies to you. You are recklessly wounding the feelings of others by your vituperative speeches. No, you should not go on like this. People come to you to know the way of peace, and what do you give them? —a shower of abuses. Infinite love dwells in your heart, but you are submerging it in a storm of unbridled passions—"

"Oh! do I give pain to people by my words?—how I wish I should not! I did not know I was such a tyrant. I mean always well. Oh! heartless wretch that I am!" he uttered with a deep touch of remorse, and covering his eyes with both hands wept bitterly. Then he pleaded: "Show me a way to control this insane mind. At times it burns like a furnace and my head seems to be splitting. Oh! show me some way."

"For control of mind the best method is repetition of God's Name," advised Ramdas. "Keep the Name always on your tongue, talk little, have proper food. Above all, give up ganja smoking. This habit has been the ruin of you."

CHAPTER XIX

BANDA—GOHKAR PARVAT

(i) Nothing is impossible for God

Tapaswiji had left the hill the day following the night that Balak Ram attempted to strangle the boy-servant. The boy had also disappeared. For want of a servant it was now difficult to get meals from seth Moolchand's. Ramdas was going on milk diet, and some devotees brought him milk regularly morning and evening. Now Balak Ram also shared the milk with him. Balak Ram commenced repeating the Ram-mantram. For two days he remained quiet. He was free from fits of temper. Ganja was eschewed. He talked very little. He was resigned and peaceful. On the second day he said that he felt hungry.

Straightway, Ramdas with an escort proceeded to Budhram Kuva where sadhu Vishuddhanand resided. At the sight of him the sadhu went into ecstasies. He welcomed him with a fond embrace. He was an old man, lean and tall, with a long white beard and hair reaching his shoulders. He wore only a kaupin. Ramdas told him that he had come to beg for a meal for the sake of Balak Ram.

"I would allow you to carry food to him," he said, "only after you have had your meal here."

He was an active old man. Within half an hour he cooked a simple meal of soft roties and dal. Then he took Ramdas to a well. The place was named after the saint at whose instance the well was dug. Before Vishuddhanand came to occupy the place, there lived a sadhu who went by the name Budhram. Hence the name Budhram Kuva, that is, Budhram's well.

As an Indian mother washes her child, so Vishuddhanand bathed Ramdas with his own hands, drawing water from the well. Then feeding him with a plain but wholesome meal he had prepared, he permitted Ramdas to leave him, carrying a meal for Balak Ram. Balak Ram took the food. In the evening his craving for ganja returned, and unable to resist he smoked it again. God's Name left his tongue, the old temper subdued for two days once more raised its vicious hood.

The following day, he proposed to have a Ramlila performance at the cave. It is a religious function in which two men sing alternately, to the accompaniment of musical instruments, the exploits of Sri Ramchandra. These performances are popular in the United Provinces, and hundreds of people assemble on the occasion. Balak Ram, since morning, was trying to persuade the visitors to arrange for the function, but none would take any interest in the matter. He was sorely upset and disappointed.

At midday, Ramdas was lying down in the small cave, when the pujari of the Mahadev temple, a frequent visitor, came up:

"Pujari, you must somehow manage to have Ramlila performed here tonight," said Balak Ram.

"Maharaj," he replied, "I am a poor man. The performance will cost ten rupees. I don't see how I can collect so much money."

"No, no, pujari, I am bent upon it. Do arrange any way," insisted Balak Ram.

"You are asking me to do the impossible," pleaded the pujari.

Ramdas in the cave was listening to their conversation and, at this juncture, spoke:

"Pujari, nothing is impossible for God. Why do you think you are the doer in any matter? Take it that you are merely His instrument and set about this business, and God will crown your efforts with success," assured Ramdas.

"Well, if it be Mahadev's will let it be done. I feel now I can be a tool in His hands in this affair. I am going," and he left.

Balak Ram had still his doubts; time passed. It was nearing five o'clock and he remarked in a despondent tone:

"Maharaj, there is no hope of Ramlila. The pujari is not to be seen."

"There is yet time; don't be impatient," said Ramdas.

Ten minutes had not elapsed when half a dozen men arrived, carrying with them all the necessaries for the Ramlila performance—rugs, carpets, flowers, gas lights, sweets, agarbattis, fruits, festoons and other articles. A party of musicians also came with their musical instruments. Now Balak Ram's face brightened.

"Maharaj," he said to Ramdas, "will you kindly go to Vishuddhanand and fetch him? His blessed company is also needed at this function. He will come only if you invite him personally."

Ramdas accordingly started and went to Budhram Kuva and begged the old sadhu to grace the performance with his presence. He agreed and both reached the cave on the hill by seven o'clock. Meanwhile, the place at the front of the cave had been beautifully decorated. The rugs and carpets were spread on the floor and over a hundred persons of both sexes had assembled, and the gas lamp was shedding its brilliant light on the scene. The pujari was busy arranging things.

Balak Ram, Vishuddhanand and Ramdas sat in a line at the mouth of the cave and the Ramlila celebration commenced. The singers possessed a sweet voice and the air thrilled with their music. The performance continued till one o'clock when the crowd dispersed.

(ii) The Absolute Fast

On the day following the Ramlila performance, Ramdas roamed over the Bambeshwar hill and came across another cave, a few yards above the one occupied by Balak Ram. It was made up of large blocks of rock leaning against each other forming below a big cavity, having an opening right at the top where the rocks met. The entrance to the cave was a narrow passage through which one could not pass abreast. One had to force oneself sideways.

He went inside and saw that the space within was sufficient to accommodate one person. Caves exerted a strange influence on him. The moment he saw one he would decide to spend some days in it. This cave also appeared to invite him for a stay, but on condition that he should remain in it without food and drink, not even water, observing at the same time the vow of silence.

Going down to Balak Ram, he said: "Ramji, a little way up there is a cave. Ram wills that Ramdas should dwell in it and go on an absolute fast. He should not drink even water, and should hold perfect silence."

"For what period is the fast to last?" questioned he.

"Ramdas has no idea, Ram will determine it," Ramdas answered.

Balak Ram obtained through the visitors a basketful of cow-dung and, having the inside of the cave well swept, smeared it with a layer of it. After the floor was dry he spread on it a torn mat he had. In making these arrangements Balak Ram manifested great enthusiasm. In the evening Ramdas occupied the cave. He sat up on the mat in utter darkness, mentally repeating th Ram-mantram. Where the rocks that formed the cave met were deep recesses filled with dry leaves. In the darkness the rustling noises produced by creeping creatures living in these recesses would fall on his ears. Sometimes he would feel they were crawling quite near him. Fear had gone out of his life. He was calm and undisturbed. An upward glance revealed the distant blue heavens, glittering with twinkling stars through the angular opening, at the summit of the cave.

The day dawned. Balak Ram came to see him and remained for a few minutes. Seeing Ramdas silent and indifferent he left. The day passed. The time was mid-summer. Summer in the United Provinces is attended with extreme heat. From ten to five during the day the sun was belching forth fire. The rocks of the cave exposed to the direct blaze of the sun would burn with intense heat. Fiery breezes were blowing into the cave through the narrow entrance. Ramdas scarcely moved from the mat. The second day passed.

On the third day he rose above body consciousness, and his experience was that he felt a solemn blankness in existence. A stillness and peace pervaded his being. He was now mostly lying down on the mat flat on his back. He had not a wink of sleep and his eyes were ever open, even in the nights, for he could not keep them shut long. Neither weakness nor pangs of hunger affected him in the least. Balak Ram was paying him a visit every morning. He thought that the fast was for his sake. He hoped that by Ramdas' austerity he would attain liberation. Ramdas did not know nor did he care to know the why and wherefore of the fast. He simply observed it by Ram's will.

At midnight, on the third day, Ramdas was sitting on the asan when suddenly a thunder crash was heard and for a quarter of an hour it rained in torrents. The rain pouring down the opening at the roof of the cave, directly fell on him as though he were seated beneath a waterfall. He was wholly drenched and the cave was filled with water to the height of an inch. He budged not. His only cloth and the mat were thoroughly soaked. Next day the heat of the sun was as rigorous as ever, and so, by noon, the water in the cave dried up; so also the cloth and the mat.

The news of the fast spread in the city of Banda. People in large numbers mounted the hill to see him. Many of them came only as far as the lower cave and after inquiries with Balak Ram returned, while some ascended to the upper cave in which Ramdas lived. They would only peep within through the narrow passage, but none dared to enter. They displayed a superstitious awe.

However, in the afternoon, a man boldly came in. Ramdas was reclining. The visitor sat down at first at his feet and slowly commenced massaging his legs. Then drawing near Ramdas' face, he burst into tears. He wept like a child. Brushing aside his tears by the sleeves of his coat, he spoke:

"Maharaj, I am a poor cobbler. I do my work on the roadside. One of my customers, who came to me for repairing his shoes, narrated the story of your fast. He said that you had even eschewed drinking water. The news terribly upset me. I thought: How could I go home and take my dinner, knowing that there is one on the hill who is starving? My mind revolted at the idea. Dazed and bewildered I at once threw down the work and ran up here. Now, my resolution is this: until you take food I am determined not to have it for myself. I prefer to fast with you. Till then, I am also going to stick to this cave."

His speech struck a chord in Ramdas' heart which was silent during the fast and set it vibrating. His whole frame responded to the thrill that emanated from it. He suddenly sat up with a bound and, placing both his hands on the shoulders of the cobbler, asked:

"What do you want Ramdas to do?"

"Take food, of course," he replied.

"Well, get him something then," Ramdas said.

"I shall bring whatever you want," he answered eagerly.

"A cup of milk," Ramdas suggested.

At once the cobbler friend left the cave and reappeared in ten minutes with a bowl filled with milk. He was panting which showed that he must have run to and from the bazaar.

"Here you are, maharaj," he said and offered the milk. Ramdas drank it.

(iii) Balak Ram, the Prodigal

The fast broken, Ramdas immediately abandoned the cave and came down. Balak Ram was surprised to see him.

"Ramji," Ramdas told him, "Ram commands Ramdas to quit the hill and depart from Banda; he is off."

"Fine, I would also follow. My place is with you. I cannot give you up," he replied.

Ramdas dissuaded him, but he was obstinate. Both descended the hill and he directed Ramdas to the house of seth Moolchand. The seth and his wife welcomed them with great joy. Ramdas proposed to leave Banda on foot for Jhansi, early next morning.

"Swamiji, I shall take you to Mahoba," interposed and urged Balak Ram. "About three miles from the town is a place worth visiting—of hills and jungles. It is considered to be a tapobhumi. It is called Gohkar Parvat. I had occasion to live on the hills for some months. Now we shall proceed straight to that spot, not on foot but by railway."

There was a night train running to Mahoba, and Ramdas suggested departure by that train. Meanwhile, a large number of people had gathered in Moolchand's house for the darshan of the sadhus. Among them was the devout sister of Moolchand. She came forward.

"Maharaj," she said, "I have an humble appeal to you. I beg that you may postpone your journey till tomorrow night. My prayer is that you should both grace my house with your presence tomorrow for the midday meal."

Ramdas accepted her invitation and Balak Ram followed suit. The night was passed in the front-yard of Moolchand's house. The following day, at eleven o'clock, Moolchand's sister came to escort the sadhus to her house. She was the wife of a rich merchant.

The sadhus were taken to a room on the upper floor of her big house. Seated, side by side, they were served with meals. They were fed on choice dishes. The mother was all love. The meal over, she requested Ramdas to enlighten them with a discourse on bhakti. All the ladies of the household assembled in the room to hear him. Although his Hindi was poor he would grow eloquent when he talked on religious topics. He spoke for nearly an hour. He intermingled in his discourse many Puranic episodes describing how in the life of devotees, after a keen struggle, bhakti triumphed. In short he held out devotion to God as the one purpose of human existence. The listeners were touched by the talk and tears of pure emotion flowed down their cheeks.

Now, he was about to start when Balak Ram beckoning him to be seated a few minutes more, said: "I have also a few words to say"—then turning his gaze at the hostess, "Twenty rupees down for sadhu seva,—at once, quick," and raising his right hand high in the air he brought it down striking the floor with his palm. The kind hostess and other ladies were struck dumb at this sudden demand.

"Mataji," said Balak Ram, "why do you hesitate?—come along—no time to lose; twenty rupees down."

The bewildered mother left the room and reappearing with the money placed a pile of twenty rupees in silver in front of the sadhus. Balak Ram at once closed his fingers on the pile and holding the amount in his hand got up.

"Swamiji, let us now go," he said turning to Ramdas. They went out and reached Moolchand's house.

Balak Ram, now a master of wealth, set about discovering ways and means of spending it. He called a visitor to his side and said: "Here are six rupees; get me from the bazaar orange coloured cloth sufficient for a gown, and also a tailor." The visitor left with the money.

"Now, you there," he called another, "here, two rupees: bring me two rupees worth of charas (extract of ganja)." The second visitor was also sent away on his errand.

In a couple of hours he had the long loose gown decking his body and had a few full doses of charas smoke. He had still eleven rupees left. The coins jingled in his hands and he was laughing most benignantly.

"Swamiji, let us take a round in the bazaar," he suggested.

A party started consisting of Balak Ram, Ramdas and three or four others. He strutted in the streets as if he were "the monarch of all he surveyed." His outstretched arms moved to and fro, his shoulders rose and fell at every stride, his legs wide apart tramped with a measured and proud pace; his head, seemingly poised on a loose pivot, moved like a pendulum from one side to the other. His whole bearing showed that he wanted to impress upon the ignorant world that a great personage had been gracious enough to bless the streets of Banda with his holy tread! In the thickly crowded bazaar people made way at his approach. Many bowed and prostrated before him. O! Ram, what wonderful masks you put on!

Balak Ram descrying an umbrella shop got in and came out with a fashionable umbrella worth three rupees. Next, entering a shop of footwear, he purchased a pair of shining shoes and a pair of socks, striped yellow and red.

Now he flourished the umbrella in his right hand, and as the shoes were of a size too small for his feet he hobbled along, adding to the majesty of his gait. Merchants in their shops forgetting for a time to attend to their customers, gazed on Balak Ram in wonder, not unmixed with awe. At last the party arrived at the point from which they started, that is, Moolchand's house.

"Curses be on the bootmaker," he shouted.

Sitting on a bench he asked one of the devotees to pull out his shoes at once. One of the party removed the shoes from off his feet, as also the socks. When Balak Ram raised his heels what did he see?—two blisters as big as marbles!

"The blackguard!" he cried out in rage, "he cheated me downright. He shall not go scot-free—come on, let us go to him; I would have a good pull at his long beard."

The party started again, now on an adventure. He made one of the party carry the shoes. Giving up his lordly gait Balak Ram was now hurrying on at a brisk pace. His hands were presumably itching to have a tug at the Muslim's beard! They came before the shop but it was closed. In the intoxication of charas, Balak Ram did not remember the shop from which he had made the purchase. Adjoining the closed shop was another dealer in boots and a bearded old man was seated at the counter. Balak Ram approached him, and was about to give a full and free play to his well-trained tongue when Ramdas pulled him by the sleeves and warned him:

"Look here, you are about to tear up the wrong man. It is from the closed shop that you bought the pair of shoes. Let us be away."

The party turned back. Balak Ram was fuming like a suppressed volcano. All the way he had conjured up a charming array of choice epithets to be shot at the shop-keeper, but all went in vain! His chagrin was great. But he made good the loss to some degree. He stood before the closed shop and delivered himself of the invective on the absent bootmaker, dragging into it also his ancestors and descendants, resolving them all finally into one lump of the most despicable piece of humanity. On their way back to Moolchand's house, in a rumbling sound like slow thunder, he further gave vent to some newly remembered choice bits of billingsgate.

(iv) Cause of Toothache

By the night train Balak Ram and Ramdas started from Banda and reached Mahoba early the next morning. In the bazaar they were greeted by Balak Ram's old friends. Of these, two—Bahadur and Jagannath—were most assiduous in their attention. In the evening they proceeded to the Gohkar Parvat. When leaving the town, Balak Ram divested himself of the long gown and presented it to a friend in the bazaar. Similarly, the umbrella and the shoes were also given away. He remained in bare kaupin.

The Gohkar Parvat was made up of a series of mountains, some low and others high. The mountains were formed of huge black boulders piled up together. Here tall trees were sparse, but the hills were covered over with a thick growth of shrubs and grass. At a lower level, around the extensive area of the hills, were small lakes bearing on their placid bosom red and white lotuses. As they climbed the hills, they reached a central piece of level ground, enclosed all round by lofty hills. Right in the middle of this level ground was a heap of giant rocks, about a hundred feet high. At the base of this pile was a cave like a cubical room. Now a difficult ascent, a few yards upwards, revealed another spacious but very low compartment between two broad and flat rocks. In this compartment was another recess which could just accommodate one person. The compartment and the recess were so low that one could move in it only on one's haunches. This rocky upper chamber was occupied for the night.

Balak Ram's temper was as bad as ever. At the least provocation he railed violently at the visitors. When alone with him Ramdas again talked to him of peace. In response he resolved that he would from the ensuing day observe perfect silence, live on mere milk diet, and not quit the chamber for seven days. He also desired to remain quite solitary and to allow no visitors to come up except Ramdas. The latter undertook to carry for him from below, milk, water, etc. He also appealed to Balak Ram to go on with the repetition of Ram-nam.

Next day Ramdas took his position under a slanting rock at the base of the hill. The visitors commenced to pour in. They demanded to see Balak Ram. Ramdas explained to them the situation as it stood. They were much disappointed and grumbled. He discharged the duty imposed on him; that is, on the one hand, of persuading the visitors not to climb up the hill to see Balak Ram and, on the other, of carrying food and water to him in his solitary cell.

One thing has to be noted that this part of the hill was bereft of water supply. There was neither a spring nor a well.

Water had to be brought from a well nearly two miles from the cave. The kind friends Bahadur and Jagannath arranged for the supply.

One night Ramdas discovered Balak Ram lying down on a flat rock, at the top of the cave, moaning and crying with pain.

"What is the matter with you, Ram?" Ramdas asked, approaching him.

"Maharaj, I have a severe attack of toothache. I cannot bear the excruciating pain," he sobbed.

Ramdas passed his hand over him soothingly, when he added: "Do you know why I suffer like this? I shall tell you: I can well understand that it is all due to the curses of my wife and children whom I have deserted."

"Lord!" Ramdas exclaimed "if that be the case why not return to them?"

"Impossible," he jerked out: "I have absolutely severed myself from them, leaving no hope of return."

"There is no such thing, Ram. You can yet go back to them if only you make up your mind," Ramdas assured him.

But Balak Ram was firm in his convictions. Soon after this he fell asleep and the following day he was free from pain.

Day after day passed. The visitors from the city, who came in large numbers, clamoured for Balak Ram's darshan. They in a way accused Ramdas of being at the bottom of the affair. But he took their remarks in good part. Balak Ram, on the other side, was also growing impatient. He struggled with his mind which revolted against the restrictions imposed on it. On the fifth day, a large crowd of devotees at the foot of the hill raised a hue and cry, and the noise reached the ears of Balak Ram in his seclusion. Out he came like a prisoner set free, and jumping from stone to stone was in a minute in the midst of the crowd. He received from the mass a loud ovation.

For a few minutes he was mild, cheerful and smiling. The passion that lay dormant for five days once more raised its hood. Now its venom flowed with unabated fury, in a torrent of abuse on all the people assembled there. At this the crowd slowly melted away and dispersed. The majority skulked away to their homes. A few remained who tolerated and loved him, in spite of his violent nature. Many of his admirers knew that his outbursts were not to be taken seriously and that his heart was tender, compassionate and loving. Ramdas once observed him fondling a baby. He was simply lost in raptures when he was in its society. He was an avowed enemy of falsehood, deceit and greed. Towards these his attitude was most violent and uncompromising.

On the evening of the same day, when Balak Ram became free from the restrictions of his vow, Ramdas expressed his wish to leave Mahoba that night for Jhansi. Balak Ram remonstrated, wept, caught Ramdas' feet, appealed and did his best to detain him for a longer period. But Ramdas was so firm in his resolution that Balak Ram could not move him this time. Accordingly, he started by the night train from Mahoba and reached Jhansi next morning.

CHAPTER XX

MOUNT ABU

(i) Sri Shanti Vijayji—A pure Saint

Ramdas again occupied Atkhamba on the bank of Lakshmitalao. On the day of his arrival he had an attack of high fever which lasted for three days. Ramkinkar attended on him. He grew extremely anxious about Ramdas and sometimes wept when he had very high fever. Ramdas refused to be treated with medicine and suggested a fast for a day or two. At first Ramkinkar opposed the idea but had to yield when he saw the fever continuing. A two days' fast cured him of the malady.

Here Ramdas received an invitation from mother Elizabeth, the English lady, who was then living on Mount Abu. He made up his mind to visit Mount Abu. Ramkinkar and other friends of Jhansi proposed that he should have an ashram somewhere in Bundelkhand. After some discussion they fixed Gohkar Parvat as a place suitable for such an ashram. They insisted upon his return after the visit to Mount Abu. Ramcharandas also came to Jhansi about this time. He requested again that he be allowed to keep Ramdas' company. The latter asked him to go in advance to Mahoba where he would meet Ramcharandas on his return from Mount Abu. Ramdas once more met Swami Nirbhayanand and his noble wife at their kuti. Before leaving Jhansi he had his last dinner with them.

A wire had been sent beforehand to mother Elizabeth of Ramdas' coming. In due time he reached Abu Road station. Raja Ram's sepoy was awaiting his arrival. By motor-bus, Ramdas with his escort went up Mount Ābu about twenty miles.

At last he came to the bungalow of mother Elizabeth. She had at the time two prominent guests—the Thakore Saheb of Limbdi and Sir P. Pattani, Dewan of Bhavnagar State.

Mother Elizabeth greeted Ramdas with manifest joy. A room in her villa had been prepared for him. Next day the party was joined by a saint of Jamnagar, Ramprasad. Ramdas preferred to live on milk and fruit diet. He would sit at the mother's table in the company of her distinguished guests for taking his milk and fruit. The mother was overhelming in her love and kindness. She would almost feed him with her own hands. He remained at Mount Abu for about twelve days. He would here chronicle only one or two important incidents during his short stay on the hill.

He was ever having the Ram-mantram on his lips. The room in which he dwelt was ringing with its sound. Now mother Elizabeth had engaged some masons to raise a compound wall round her house. They were working about twenty yards from his room. One day the mother came in a hurry to him, and asked:

"Ramdas, have you taught the mantram also to the masons? I hear them repeating it while they are at work."

In fact the mantram was automatically uttered by all in the compound. In the nights after three, Pattani Ram—so he was named—was heard singing the mantram. He had a suite of rooms close to Ramdas'. The brahman cook and sepoys of Raja Ram and other servants were also found singing the mantram to themselves. Once when the mother with Raja Ram, Pattani Ram and Ramdas was motoring towards the famous Dilwara Temple, the car was ringing with the loud music of the mantram; every occupant of the car was singing the mantram at a high pitch. It caught everybody like a contagion.

The Dilwara Temple which they visited was a very picturesque edifice carved in white marble. The sculptor has freely lavished all his genius and skill in making the temple a unique piece of architecture. As you entered, you came upon a quadrangular set of structures with a central block in which the main image of Mahavira, the great saint of Jainism, was installed. The quadrangles consisted of long verandahs, open inside, having on the walls, ceiling and pillars exquisite carvings of emblems and designs with the figures of nude Mahavira at intervals in the niches on the walls. The cupola of the central dome was also a wonderful piece of sculpture, carved in artistic devices.

The Jain saints, who resided within the temple, were kind enough to take Ramdas round and show the interior of the shrine. At its front, there was a small structure of marble with a number of caparisoned elephants, fashioned out of pure white marble, and on the decorated howdahs of these elephants were seated effigies of ancient Jain kings.

Mother Elizabeth looked upon a Jain saint, Sri Shanti Vijayji, who lived in one of the caves of Mount Abu, as her guru or spiritual teacher. Once she had proposed to take Ramdas to him, but he evinced no enthusiasm in the matter, and the idea was dropped. But suddenly one morning the mahatma himself turned up at her villa. The mother introduced Ramdas to him. He was seated on an asan on the floor of one of her rooms. Ramdas going up to him embraced him with great joy. He returned the embrace with as much delight. Then Ramdas sat beside him. He was humility personified. He was a stout and short figure with full black beard. He wore only one cloth across his shoulders. The cloth was at places torn and dirty. His eyes had a distant look of meditation. He radiated purity and peace. Ramdas had no talk with him. He could speak only in Gujarati and Ramdas was a stranger to that tongue.

(ii) Knowledge is to know you know nothing

One day the mother took out Ramdas for a walk on the hills and she showed him the extent of her property. She said:

"I always like the society of saints; any other kind of company jars me, especially of householders who are immersed in worldly things." In the course of the talk, Ramdas had to say: "Mother, Ramdas' weak body may not live long. There is a presentiment that it is to drop shortly."

"Don't you say so, it has yet to do great things," she returned. The period taken up by the walk was about half an hour, after which they retraced their steps to the villa.

The mother wished in her heart that he should eat meals prepared by her hands. Her silent wish strangely produced a response in him. He involuntarily requested her to feed him with food cooked by herself. With the greatest delight and overflowing love, she got ready some wheat roties for him which tasted quite heavenly.

Another day a sepoy of Raja Ram, a kind friend, took him out for a stroll. He asked the friend to lead him to a solitary place, away from the haunts of men. But being of an officious nature, the sepoy escorted him to a distant cave occupied by a sannyasi. In the midst of a jungle he found himself in front of a large wide open rock-cut cave. In it was seated a young sannyasi, clad in ochre-coloured cloth, clean shaven, with a number of books scattered beside him.

The kind friend whispered into Ramdas' ears: "This is Swami Kaivalyanand." Ramdas went up to the sannyasi and prostrated before him.

With a look of surprise he asked: "To whom are you offering this salutation?"

"To Ram," Ramdas replied.

"Who are you?"

"Ramdas."

"Ramdas, Ramdas, funny ain't it? There is only one Truth. Why do you assume this false duality?"

"It is Ram himself, being One, has chosen to be many."

"Wrong, He is always One; many is false, is illusion," he said.

"Truth has become God and His devotee for the sake of lila or play."

"Why play?" he asked.

"For love and bliss; so, when Ramdas, prostrates before you, it is yourself who do it in the form of Ramdas," Ramdas rejoined.

"Bosh, there is only one, never two."

"To whom are you talking then, Swamiji?"

He reflected for a while and replied, "To myself."

"Exactly—you assume there are two although in the light of absolute Truth there is only one."

"No, no—no realised man believes in duality."

"What of Tulsidas, Surdas, Kabir, Samarth Ramdas and many others?"

"Oh!" he laughed, "they had not attained jnana. They were struggling still on a lower plane!"

"But their teachings and works show that they possessed high illumination. They held out parabhakti as the highest realisation," Ramdas rejoined.

"I maintain they were ignorant folk," and, taking a book from the pile near him, he added, "brush them all aside, here, take this book and read; you will understand things more clearly."

"Ramdas does not need to understand. Knowledge has been defined to him as that state in which you know that you know nothing."

"Well well, I say read this work; it is written by me."

He pressed Ramdas hard to accept it. A glance at the book revealed its title and its author: "Will to Satchidanand by Swami Kaivalyananda, M.A." Ramdas took leave of him after his usual way of a parting dandawat at his feet. He carried the book with him.

Again Ramdas, in the company of the same sepoy friend, visited the Ram mandir of the place. Here he met many Vaishnav saints who treated him with great kindness. While returning they passed through a road beside a large lake, sparkling with limpid blue waters. On the bosom of the lake were seen Europeans, in their bathing dress, rowing in pleasure boats. Mount Abu is a beautiful place, cool even at midday in the summer. The sceneries and landscapes are charming. The air is pure and refreshing.

(ii) The Mother's love prevailed

On the following day, at the morning meal, Ramdas announced his desire to leave the place for Wadhwan and Limbdi wherefrom he was receiving repeated calls, the last being an urgent telegram.

The mother was greatly upset by the news. She appealed to him to remain for some days longer and looked to her guests for their support. They also, at her pressure, tried to persuade him to stay.

"Ramdas," said the mother, "the heat in Limbdi nowadays is terrible. We hear reports that even birds drop down from the trees and die on account of unbearable heat. You should not go into a fiery place from the cool heights of Abu."

"Mother," Ramdas replied, "love knows no discomfort. The people of Limbdi and Wadhwan are very anxious to have him with them. It is their love that calls him so imperatively."

"No, you shall not go. I am your mother; I would take care of your frail body. It needs rest in a cool climate. Please don't go."

Ramdas was adamant.

He left the table and went out to the verandah. The mother ran after him and with folded hands said: "You must, Ramdas, stay with us for at least four days more; don't say no. I depend upon you. You will oblige me so much." Ramdas stopped and was silent for a tense minute. The mother's appealing eyes changed the side of the balance.

"All right, mother—for four days more," said Ramdas.

When she heard the reply she went into ecstasies. She skipped with joy and rubbed with her hands his two palms which he had held up in the mode of salutation. What a glorious heart she possessed!

Many prominent men who had come up to Abu for the summer visited Ramdas in his room and held long conversations with him. Love poured in on him from all sides. Amongst them there was also the saint named Ramprasad from Jamnagar who lived in a small detached house, close to mother Elizabeth's villa on the same grounds. It appeared he had founded an orphanage in Jamnagar in which the poor and helpless children found rest, training and food. The saint had expressed a desire that Ramdas should pay a visit to the orphanage, but Ram did not afford him an opportunity for fulfilling his wish.

On the day previous to his departure, Raja Ram suggested that as he was to return to his state four days later, it would be as well for him to travel in his company. As an inducement he held out:

"Ramdas, I am going in my special saloon car and you can also travel in it."

"Ramdas' departure tomorrow has already been fixed; he cannot change it. He travels always third class. Even if he were to travel by the same train as the one you were to go by, he would prefer a third class carriage to your well-furnished saloon," replied Ramdas.

Raja Ram became silent. Now the mother wished to have somebody to escort Ramdas as far as Wadhwan. He made her understand that an escort was quite unnecessary as, being a fakir, he was accustomed to travel long distances alone.

"No, Ramdas, for my satisfaction I would send with you Raja Ram's sepoy," she said.

Raja Ram also agreed with Ramdas that there was no need of an escort for him. But the mother was unshakably firm in her resolution.

Next day the kind mother motored him and the sepoy to the bus-stand. She made him sit comfortably in the bus. As the bus moved she turned back in her motor and cast a last lingering look from eyes that were moist. She must have felt the separation very keenly. O! mother, what infinite love you have in your bosom for your child, Ramdas!

The sepoy friend, who had a basket of fruits kindly provided by mother Elizabeth, led him to a third class compartment and was about to open the door of the carriage when a sadhu, sitting near the door, shouted that there was no room in the compartment. He firmly pulled the door inwards to prevent its being opened. But the sepoy friend, a strong man, opened it in spite of the resistance and asked Ramdas to get in. When he was entering, the sadhu stretched his arm in front to obstruct his ingress. But the sepoy coming up brushed his arm aside and made way. Both found seats in the train. There was room sufficient not only for two but for ten!

In the carriage there were about a dozen sadhus. The train moved on. It reached a catering station where it would halt for over half an hour. Here the sadhus ordered for purees and curry from the platform vendor of eatables. Now they were busy with their meal when a passenger got into the compartment with purees and curry, of course, for his own dinner. The moment he entered, the sadhus rose as one man with their sticks in hand and threatened him to leave the carriage at once.

"You polluted wretch! how did you dare to get in with your meal in this compartment in which we, sadhus, are eating? Get down at once or we shall belabour you with our sticks."

The poor passenger, like a frightened rabbit, jumped down to the platform and made his way towards another carriage.

"This is sadhuism, maharaj," remarked the sepoy friend to Ramdas.

CHAPTER XXI

WADHWAN—IN THE TRAIN

(i) Bala Mandir

A wire had been sent to Dr. Shukla of Ramdas' coming. Dr. Shukla, Chunibhai, Maganlal, and others met him at the Wadhwan station. This time he stopped at Dr. Shukla's house. He and his wife were supremely happy to see him. He spent here only four or five days. The days had a crowded programme.

Visitors came in large numbers to see him. They put him questions on devotion and on the efficacy of God's Name. He was kept busy placing before them his own experiences. He said in reply to a question:

"To control the mind the best and easiest method is to repeat constantly God's Name. Concentration is attained by fixing the attention on the sound of the Name. As the mind is concentrated there must follow meditation upon the glorious attributes of God. Continuous practice of utterance of the Name and meditation stops the restlessness of the mind and merges it into the blissful, eternal and universal Self. God-remembrance is not possible unless you have an intense longing to realise Him. This intense desire is called bhakti. This longing must so seize your mind that you should feel a sensation of acute pain when you forget God on account of selfish desires. Your actions should also go to purify your mind, i.e., they should be done in a spirit of nishkama. Purity of mind means freedom from lust, wrath and greed. For, a pure mind alone can see God. Concentration itself is purity. Forget not that the God that you seek is within yourself."

One day Ramdas was taken to the State Bala Mandir where children ranging from one and a half years to about four years of age received instruction. When he visited the school they had over a hundred children. As soon as he entered the mandir and saw the little ones, his heart bounded with untold joy. He directly went and sat in their midst. Instead of feeling shy in the presence of a stranger, they accepted him as one of them. They came and sat on his lap and sought to climb up his shoulders, all the time uttering the name "Sitaram, Sitaram." They were perfectly friendly and quite jolly. Then they gambolled round him singing in great glee. It was a unique experience, full of bliss.

The teacher, a quiet and kind soul, made them dance in a circle with small sticks in hand to the music of "Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram." They were provided with small low desks having drawers in which they kept their writing materials. Ramdas saw their first attempts at letters and drawings. They had also varieties of games on the kindergarten system. They were taught to do things in simple and quiet ways without their playful, child-like nature. being hampered. He was a tiny girl of about two years sweeping the floor, on her own initiative, very carefully. The teacher said that she was the most intelligent child of the lot.

In memory of the visit, Chunibhai had arranged to distribute to the children milk and sweets. There was a separate room for feeding them. Here were placed in line low wooden stools as is the fashion in Hindu households. The children took their seats. Some of them were engaged in serving the rest with eatables. Before each child a china saucer was placed by the serving children, and then a bit of sweetmeat was gently placed in it. The whole proceeding went on so quietly that there was not the least bustle, confusion or unusual hurry. A small cup of milk was also placed beside the saucer.

There was perfect order and serenity. When everything was ready—till then the children waited patiently and all children were in their seats—the teacher uttered a prayer which was repeated by the children in chorus. At the close of the prayer they commenced eating. They handled the cup and saucer very gently. It was all a charming sight.

Next morning the instructor got the whole party of children at Dr. Shukla's and made them sing and dance in a ring to the music of Ram bhajan. At the close of the performance they were again given milk and sweets. Bala mandir was under the direct control and management of the Wadhwan State. Cushioned fourwheeled carriages, drawn by horses, were provided for the institution to fetch the children from the respective homes to the school, and then take them back after school hours. It was a free school and tiffin was given to the children in the school at State expense. The school hours were from eight to eleven in the morning.

Another day he visited a similar institution outside the city, started in the name of Mahatma Gandhi by a rich man. Here also the tuition was given to the children almost on lines similar to those in the Bala mandir. The peculiarity of both the schools was that the teachers talked to the little ones very gently and in whispers. No harsh or loud commands escaped their lips. The teachers were so kind and friendly to Ramdas. After distribution of sweets he closed his visit to the second school.

Jivraj Baloo, a sadhaka, would constantly come to him. He had retired from worldly life and was living for his sadhanas in a solitary spot in the midst of fields outside the city. Here he had a small kuti in which he dwelt. He asked Ramdas to pay a visit to his kuti. The Dewan saheb was also invited. So both drove to the kuti in the Dewan's carriage. Jivraj Baloo embraced Ramdas and was extremely happy to have him there. The host then gave the guests a treat of milk. Ramdas was then asked to deliver a discourse. He spoke for about half an hour. It was followed by music. Jivraj sang some songs composed by himself.

In the evenings at Dr. Shukla's house Chhotabhai would entertain the assembled devotees with music playing upon the dilruba—an Indian musical instrument.

(ii) Worship with boot-kicks

As on the previous occasion, Ramdas occupied Kantilal's house in Limbdi. The eagerness of the people of Limbdi to behold him again was so great that no sooner had he arrived there than hundreds of them visited the house. The same programme, as at the last time, was gone through in almost all its details.

Dr. Shukla, Chunibhai and Chhotabhai came down every day from Wadhwan to see him. Ramdas was continuing his milk diet. He had invitations from Ugarchand seth and Mohanbhai, the noted merchants of Limbdi. The old sugarcandy mothers were filled with no small joy to have him again in their midst. One of the old ladies by name Gangamai aged over seventy years would crawl up the staircase with great difficulty, and coming to him would thrust in his mouth a piece of sugarcandy and embrace him. Indeed wonderful was her devotion!

After a few days' stay in Limbdi, he received a command from Ram to leave the place for Gohkar Parvat, en route to Jhansi.

He entrained for Jhansi. When travelling via Ujjain, several changes had to be made. At Bina he had to get into a train running to Jhansi. The time was about ten in the night. When he was entering a carriage a Mussulman obstructed him but he slipped in. He had a single ochre-coloured cloth, as usual, wound on his body, and a ticket tied to its corner. Now the carriage was full of Muslim passengers, and everyone was lying down at full length on their beddings, leaving no room for any other passenger. However, he got a perch at the feet of a Muslim who was a short-statured man. The train moved on. At the next station, a number of new passengers poured into the carriage, all Muslims. They had to stand in the narrow passage between the seats; not a single sleeper made room for them. Ramdas felt he could abandon his seat for one of them and quietly slipped down to the floor of the carriage and sat there. The place vacated by him was at once filled up.

At the next station a fresh batch of passengers came in; again all of them were Muslims. The rush was now so great that they began tramping through the passage with their heavy boots in search of seat. Ramdas like a rabbit crouching on the floor received their kicks with no small delight. He rolled down and twisted his body into the figure 8 so that he could take up the least room. Station after station new passengers got in. They crowded the carriage to well-nigh suffocation. Some sleeping passengers had to sit up, because they were forced to. So Ramdas was treated with boot-kicks from all the four sides! The Muslims who were seated had to knock against him when changing the position of their legs. The standing friends in the passage close to him added their share. His only cloth covered him from head to foot. He looked like a cloth bag on the floor!

Now he spoke to himself:

"Ramdas, you were receiving worship at several houses of devotees with flower garlands, sandal paste and lights. That was one kind of worship. Now here you are getting another kind, with boot-kicks! Both are same to you."

He enjoyed the fun. Morning dawned. The crowd in the train thinned. The place on the bench that he formerly occupied fell vacant and he jumped into the seat. Now a bearded old Muslim, sitting opposite, with reddened eyes and grisly beard and moustache on ends, forcibly pulled Ramdas' arm and said in a tone of command: "Get down, sit on the floor."

Ramdas stuck to his seat while another Muslim by his side, espousing his cause, rebuked the old Muslim for his gratuitous insult to Ramdas.

"Sadhu, you sit where you are. Don't move; the old man must be mad." The old Muslim calmed down.

CHAPTER XXII

GOHKAR PARVAT

(i) Reckless activity

Ramdas arrived at Jhansi. At the station he was welcomed by Ramkinkar and Mahadev Prasad. The latter embraced him and wept through joy on beholding him once more. He was put up again at Atkhamba. After two or three days' stay, he left Jhansi in the company of Ramkinkar and Chhedilal, also an earnest and loving soul. The Mahoba friends were intimated by wire of his coming. So about a dozen of them including Ramcharandas were eagerly looking for the arrival of the train at the Mahoba station. On alighting, the party was enthusiastically welcomed by the friends and were led to the city, and for the night they occupied the Mahavira's temple situated outside the town on the way to Gohkar Parvat. Next day, they ascended the Parvat and reached the caves in which he had lived on a former occassion.

A brahman boy named Kallu undertook to cook for him, and Jagannath supplied provisions. Two or three days later, a sannyasi, Bhagawan by name, whom he had seen before in Chitrakut Pilikoti Ashram in the mela of sannyasis during the Ram-navami festival, came to stay with him. Bhagawan was a pure-hearted and simple sadhu, extremely quiet and taciturn. His great love for Ramdas made him stick to the place. Ramcharandas was of course there. For nearly four months Ramdas lived on those hills.

In the company of devotees who used to come in large numbers from the surrounding villages, Ramdas would dance to the loud and measured repetition of Ram-mantram. The whole stay was a period of unique spiritual ecstasy. He would feel, when about fifty men were dancing with the sweet music of God's Name, as though the whole universe was dancing too. Dance for hours did not in the least fatigue him. Bhagwan, who was not till then accustomed to dancing, also joined them. Whoever newly came to the hills could hardly resist dancing. God's name resounded through the hills, producing an atmosphere pregnant with blissful thrills.

In the nights some devotees who possessed a sweet voice sang to the beats of a hand-drum, songs of Kabir and Banarasi. The kirtan would proceed far into the night, till two or three early morning. Ramkinkar, finding the hills awe-inspiring especially when he was told that tigers roamed about in the nights, refused to stay with him and returned to the town with the visitors. Within three or four days, his leave having expired, he left for Jhansi. Chhedilal continued his stay for a week at the expiry of which he also returned to Jhansi. He had remained on the hills day and night.

Ramdas was, during the day time, like a frisky monkey. He could not stand quiet. He would either dance or run. When he was not engaged in dance he would run up the surrounding tall hills like a squirrel. He used to feel his body extremely light, and the divine Shakti was coursing through his frame like the lightning current. When he reached the top of the hill he would cry out in a high pitch: "Hari Om," and the sacred syllables would reverberate through the hills. Every hill would echo back the sound of "Hari Om" in a distinct and ready response, filling the air with rapturous harmony.

Ramdas would be followed in his race uphill by Ramcharandas, Jagannath and one or two others. The ascents were perilous and few dared to follow him. While descending, it was not by creeping down that he would come to the bottom. He would jump from one rock to the other. At times he would recklessly take leaps over fifty feet, but everytime he alighted on the lower rock safe on all fours like an ape. Life and body were held by him light as straw. In spite of the incessant activity to which he subjected his body, he never knew exhaustion. He was as fresh and vigorous as ever.

In the wanderings on the hills with friends, he once came upon a gigantic stone image of a three-headed God, leaning against the side of a hillock. The ruins around showed that in olden days there was a temple here for the huge stone idol. He was urged from within to climb to the head of the image which he did with lightning rapidity, and on the broad crown of its head he danced with untold delight.

The party had another addition of a Vaishnava saint, Vaijnath. He would remain at the base of the cave with a fire before him telling his beads all the night. One of his disciples, an elderly mother, would come to the hills during the afternoons and entertain them with the charming songs of Mirabai. Her devotion was so great that when she sang, tears of ecstasy would course down her cheeks, and her face would be aglow with spiritual light.

The devotees hoisted on the hillock, on which Ramdas lived, a gigantic flag, ten feet by ten feet, containing in big Hindi characters the Ram-mantram "Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram." The flag was visible for miles from the hills.

It was a dark night. The rain was pouring and the air was chill. About ten o'clock, when the party of singers were deeply engaged in kirtan and Ramdas was occupying the small interior cave, a young, educated and well-dressed man turned up with an escort. Coming to Ramdas he fell at his feet and said:

"Swamiji, I am on my way to Cawnpore from Chhattarpur. I heard of you and have come for your darshan, having broken journey at Mahoba. Pray have your kripa on me."

He received from Ramdas, then and there, the upadesh of Ram-mantram. When all were silently sitting, three big centipedes appeared on the scene. They were moving about freely. A lantern was burning in the centre of the group. One of the centipedes approached the young man whose name was Ramchandra Gupta. He was shrinking from it, when Ramdas asked him not to be afraid of it, and assured him that it would do no harm. One of them actually passed over the lap of Ramdas in quite a friendly manner. Shortly after this Ramchandra left.

(ii) Alone on a dreaded Hill

Ramkinkar had specially accompanied Ramdas to Gohkar in order to arrange an ashram on those hills. He had collected over two hundred rupees for the purpose. Ugarchand seth of Limbdi had also contributed to the fund. The prospect of having a kuti on those dreadful hills did not appeal to Ramkinkar, but he could not object as Ramdas had pitched upon the place. He gave some amount to Jagannath and instructed him in the first place to dig a tank for water.

There was an attempt made by Balak Ram, when he lived there, to sink a small tank, but the work had to be given up for want of encouragement. Now it was proposed to deepen the same pond and build up the sides with stones and mortar. Coolies were engaged for the work, and on digging a few feet a spring was lighted upon, which supplied the small tank with water. The work was going on when one of the friends quarrelled with Jagannath, who managed the work, over the wages paid to the coolies and the work stopped, never to be taken up again. Ramdas dropped the idea of having an ashram there.

Ramcharandas, then only a lad of about eighteen, was perfectly fearless. One evening, as the sun went down, Ramdas asked him to go and sit for the night in a cave on the hill opposite, the biggest of the lot. The leopards and tigers have their home in the caves of this hill. He cheerfully obeyed Ramdas.

"Look here, Ram," Ramdas told him, "you have to sit in utter darkness in one of the lairs of the tigers. You should never have a wink of sleep for the night. Repeat the Ram-mantram without stopping and you have no fear—go." He went.

The night passed. At daybreak Ramdas came out of his cave and saw Ramcharandas descending the hill which he had occupied in the night. When he approached Ramdas he asked him:

"Ram, were you not afraid in the night?"

"Not in the least," he replied.

"How is that? Ram-mantram perhaps never left your lips."

"Not only that," he said, "I was there in accordance with your command and so I was perfectly certain that no harm would befall me." Wonderful was the faith of the boy!

About this time, Ramcharandas was reading a Kanarese translation of Vedantic works. He came to Ramdas one day and said:

"Swamiji, Vedanta declares everything is Brahman. Then, when I am Brahman Himself, where is the necessity for sadhana on which you lay so much stress?"

"True, Ram," replied Ramdas, "everything is Brahman, but this has to be realised; merely saying that you are Brahman cannot make you realise the truth. You ought to experience that state, rising above all sense of duality by freeing your mind from illusion. Your 'I' should no longer be the local, narrow individual 'I' but the universal, eternal and absolute 'I'. To realise this ineffable, perfect state, sadhana is necessary. Mind and its desires have to be conquered by concentration and purification."

"When there is nothing but Brahman who is to do sadhana?" Ramcharandas put in.

"You will know. Experience will teach you that the jiva has a false existence; still it exists encompassed by darkness and ignorance," said Ramdas.

He was not convinced, but it was not long before he was. He gave up repetition of God's Name and early rising. He slept like a log till late in the morning and again in the noon he slept for long hours; the result was that he was seized with unusual hunger. Stealthily he would go into the bottom cave, which was used for a store, and mixing large quantities of a mingled food-stuff called satua with water, he would quietly eat it. This he took in addition to the usual food with regard to which a fight ensued between him and Kallu the cook, who complained that Ramcharandas would eat up all the roties, leaving him nothing. One morning he appeared before Ramdas with a mottled face, full of red eruptions.

"What is the matter with you, Ram?' Ramdas asked.

"Don't know, I feel also feverish," he replied with a wry face.

"It is all due to over-eating, satua has manifested itself on the face. Is it not so?" Ramdas said laughing.

He was as quiet as a mummy. Then he crouched near Ramdas in the tiny cave which he occupied, fully covered with his cloth, but shivering with high fever.

"Ram, are you not Brahman?" Ramdas asked.

"Swamiji, now I know I am not. A wonderful way of teaching you have!"

"Ramdas is not teaching. It is Ram who teaches you. Do Ram bhajan and everything will be all right," Ramdas assured him.

Next day he went without any food, and on the third day he was all right. He took up again the Ram-mantram. One day a complaint came to him from Kallu who said that Ramcharandas was worrying him for the brass cup which he (Kallu) had somewhere mislaid.

"Yes, Swamiji," grumbled Ramcharandas, "it was a cup which was such a nice fit to my lota; I want it."

"Ram," Ramdas asked, "whose cup was it?"

"Mine," rejoined the boy.

"Nothing is yours, Ram. Everything is God's; it came from Him and has gone back to Him, so don't fret," said Ramdas.

"Very fine consolation," he said with a tinge of regret for his loss.

Thereafter he slept over the matter. One day he said that he was going to Chhattarpur to stay for some time with Balak Ram who was holding his durbar on one of the hills of that State. Ramdas was receiving invitations from him repeatedly. Ramcharandas had heard of the ways of Balak Ram. So he did not want to take with him his new lota which he loved so much.

"Swamiji, I leave the lota with you. I shall return in a few days," he said, and left.

Meanwhile, during his absence, two sadhu lads paid Ramdas a visit. One of them had a water vessel while the other was without one. The latter appealed to Ramdas to provide him with a lota since a sadhu, he added, should not go without a water vessel. Ramdas had at hand Ramcharandas' lota. He took it and passed it on to the boy. The boys departed, the one who got the lota quite joyfully.

Four days later, Ramcharandas returned but not quite happy. Balak Ram's society was anything but exhilarating to him.

At first sight Ramdas told him: "The lota you had, and which Ram gave you, has been taken away by Ram. What do you say?"

He blinked and then smiled, because he had held that Ramdas' decisions were final and not to be questioned. He had always submitted without a word. He had some friends in the town among whom was a rich merchant. He visited him that very day and returned in the evening with a brass kamandal and a large cup to fit its mouth.

"How is this, Swamiji?" he said, pointing at the kamandal which he poised in his hand stylishly.

"Grand, simply grand," replied Ramdas laughing.

Among the daily visitors there were two weavers. They presented Ramdas with a piece of pure khaddar. One of them who came in the evening overstayed. There was the usual kirtan. The pious weaver was so much absorbed in the music that he lost all account of time. It might have been past midnight, when he suddenly came to himself and exclaimed:

"Oh!—I meant to return home early in the evening. Now my people at home will be very anxious about me, since I have stayed away for the night. I am scarcely absent from home after dark without their knowledge."

"Well," Ramdas suggested, "you may go home at once."

His house was at a distance of about three miles from the hills and his way lay through the jungle. The night was pitch-dark and the wild beasts freely roamed in the jungles at that time of the night. He hesitated to venture out. But Ramdas assured him safe journey provided he kept Ramnam on his tongue. The weaver, a man of faith, boldly acted upon Ramdas' word and left the hills.

In the evening next day, he turned up and said that Ramnam had made him perfectly fearless the previous night, and he reached home without any mishap on the way.

(iii) God is Giver and God is Receiver

In the night the tigers were freely roaming in the woods surrounding the cave. With a party of a select few, Ramdas started the next day in quest of tigers in their caves so that he could come face to face with them. He rummaged cave after cave in the hills. Marks and traces of their close vicinity were seen, but no animals could be discovered. He dived boldly into the dark depths of the caves and shouted at a high pitch "Hari Om" so that they might come out and give him darshan! But none appeared. The quest had to be eventually abandoned.

Now Ramdas was bid by Ram to observe a fast and undertake a vow of silence. He lived for a week on milk diet. Silence on the part of Ramdas sorely affected the sadhu Bhagawan. He wanted always to hear Ramdas talk although he himself usually spoke very little. He suddenly made up his mind to bid adieu to Ramdas and the hills. He departed. Sadhus come and go according to their sweet will. They are free children of God.

During the period of silence and fast, two sannyasis visited Ramdas. One was a tall old man of over sixty. In spite of his age he had walked three miles, over hills and through jungle from Mahoba to see Ramdas. What love they bore for this child of God! And the other was a bright looking stout young man. He had brought with him from the town a party of devotional singers with harmonium and drums. Before starting the kirtan he remarked:

"I am not a believer in all these ways of tapasya and vows. I like music relating to the praises of God and on hearing which I go into ecstasy and it is true joy." Some beautiful songs were sung by the bhaktas. After a meal the saint left the place.

Among the visitors was also a sadhu by name Vichitranand, a simple and child-like saint but his body was dry and emaciated due to excessive ganja smoke. He had composed some touching Hindi devotional songs which are popular in Mahoba. He lived alone in a kuti near the town. He came frequently to Gohkar Parvat.

One afternoon, quite a crowd of devout mothers presented themselves at the base of the rocks clamouring to see Ramdas. In response to their call he came down from the cave. At the sight of him they were extremely delighted. Some of them massaged his legs with overflowing love. They had brought milk and eatables with which they fed him. They remained for an hour and then departed.

Another day, two European missionaries came in search of him. They could find him out only with great difficulty. In the course of their talk they emphasized the personal aspect of God as the whole truth. Ramdas confessed his faith in a God who is both personal and impersonal. He added that one could not know the glory of the supreme Person without realising His impersonal aspect as well. They expressed doubt in the truth of his statement. Without pursuing the subject further, they took their leave and returned to the town.

Now an event occurred which caused a good deal of disturbance among the friends. One morning, as customary, Kallu, the cook entered the lower cave to bring out the vessels for cooking. The vessels, a new set of which had, a short time before, been purchased for the use of the sadhus on the hill, were kept in the lower cave which had, of course, no door. All the sadhus and friends retired to the upper cave in the night. Now Kallu discovered that the vessels had disappeared. He ran up to Ramdas in a state of alarm and said:

"Maharaj, the cooking utensils have disappeared. Somebody has stolen them away."

"Good," Ramdas replied quietly, "the man who took them is evidently more in need of them than we are. It is all right. Ram gave and Ram has taken away."

He stared at Ramdas with perfect blankness when he heard his cool words. Immediately, leaving the hills, he ran to Mahoba and spread the news of the lost utensils and Ramdas' comment on the loss. The friends who had supplied the utensils understood what his words meant and at once substituted the lost vessels by some from their own homes for the time being. A police Sub-Inspector, who loved him greatly, used to come often to see him on the hill. He had also heard the news of the loss of the vessels. That afternoon he specially came to make an enquiry into the matter. He questioned Ramdas on the subject.

"Ramji, nothing is lost or stolen," Ramdas said. "It was Ram who furnished him with the vessels. It is Ram again who has taken them back. He took away his own things. So there is no question of loss or theft; therefore no case against anybody."

The surprised Inspector laughed and remarked: "If all were to follow your principle my job would be gone."

Ramdas' stay was now coming to a close. He had in hand three invitations, one from Chhattarpur, the second from Lalitpur from Triveni Prasad, and the third from Cawnpore from Ramchandra Gupta.

The day of departure from Gohkar was a notable day. There was a mela held on the hill in commemoration of a deceased Muslim Pir who had a samadhi close to the base of the pile of rocks. A Muslim saint occupied the cave on that day. Both Hindus and Muhammadans streamed into the place in thousands for the darshan of the saint. Fairs were held and there was a great din and bustle. Ramdas along with others took the darshan of the saint. The Muslims showered their love on him by embraces.

CHAPTER XXIII

LALITPUR—RAJGHAD—CHHATTARPUR

(i) Trust in God

Leaving Gohkar Ramdas came to Koteshwar in response to the invitation of seth Jwaharilal who owned a rock temple of Koteshwar Mahadev. A murti of the God was installed in a large, spacious natural cave, attached to which were built some structures for the accommodation of sadhus and visitors. The place was only about two furlongs from Mahoba. Ramcharandas had spent some months in this temple under the kind fosterage of Jwaharilal. Ramdas remained here for a night and a day and the seth arranged a dinner for thirty persons in the mandir. It was a most happy occasion.

In the evening he was led in procession through the streets of Mahoba with Ram bhajan. Some friends took him to their houses where he was treated with great love. Lastly he visited the house of Jagannath.

Leaving Mahoba, Ramdas arrived at Lalitpur. Triveni Prasad who met him at the station escorted him to his spacious house in the town. Here he remained for four days. Crowds of friends came to see and talk to him. A Ram Lila performance was held in the house. In the evenings Ramdas and Ramcharandas would dance on the front terrace of the house, singing God's Name.

One day they had a walk to the neighbouring river on the banks of which were large flat rocks called Shitapahad. Here the current of the river was very swift as it had to rush down a sudden incline. Near the banks there was no current, and here Ramdas and Ramcharandas descended for a bath.

"Swamiji, we shall make an attempt to cross the river," suggested Ramcharandas, "let us do it hand in hand."

And he dragged Ramdas with him holding him by the hand. Ramdas submitted to his pull. When they neared the current they found it hard to stand firmly on their legs, being worked on by the furious rush of water. Still they struggled on and on until they felt they were about to be swept away. Ramdas stopped.

"Ramdas is not afraid of the dissolution of the body, Ram," Ramdas said, "but to go any further means certain death by drowning, and Ram says the time for it has not yet come. Ramdas has yet to continue service of the Lord to whom he has dedicated himself; so also you. Hence let us turn back."

"No, Swamiji, we shall pass through," cried the intrepid boy. For him death was of no account. His fearlessness was admirable. But Ramdas would not permit him to proceed further in the current.

"You may return, Swamiji," he said, "I shall venture forward and reach the other bank."

Ramdas banned him of the adventure. So both retraced towards the flat rocks where Triveni Prasad and others were keenly watching their movements.

Ramdas' stay in Lalitpur was during the monsoon. One day, one of the devotees named Karta Krishna, who paid him daily visits, invited him, Ramcharandas and Triveni Prasad to his house for the midday meal. For some days it had been raining heavily, and there was an unusual downpour on that morning. The streets were muddy and cool winds were whistling through a drizzle. Tramping along many a circuitous street, they at last reached a dark lane in which the devotee lived.

Karta Krishna, who was a young man, dwelt with his family in the upstair rooms of a line of petty shops, situated on the roadside. A rugged flight of steps led them up to a narrow terrace from which a low door opened into a small rectangular room. When they entered it, the first thing that struck them was the full blaze of sunlight descending from above, as though a large portion of the roofing was made of glass. But a look upwards revealed the fact that the aged roof had extensive gaps through which rain and sun found easy access into the room. The morning rain had drenched the mud floor, and about an inch of water had collected on it. In a corner of the room, beneath a part of the roof under better repair and against the wall, stood a coir cot on which was lying a lad scarcely six years of age, enveloped in a thick cotton sheet. A small girl was in attendance.

Ramdas proceeded directly towards the cot and sitting at its foot, placed his hand upon the forehead of the boy. It was burning with high fever and the little patient was tossing from side to side in a delirious condition. Cold blasts charged with rain were sweeping over him through the openings in the roof. Besides this garret which was the only living room of the family, they had adjoining to it a five feet square dark hole which they used as kitchen.

Now came out from the kitchen a young woman with a baby of a few months in her arms. She was the wife of Karta Krishna and mother of the sick lad and the child in her arms, the nursing girl being her sister. Naturally, there was deep anguish on the face of the mother, and as she approached Ramdas and fell at his feet, she wept bitterly. The tale of woe could not be more effectively expressed. Ramdas said within himself: "Here it is, O Lord, Thy presence is needed. Thou art the friend of the helpless. Hasten, O Lord, hasten to the rescue!"

Ramdas then assured the mother: "O mother, have trust in God. He may try us, but He never abandons us. Depend upon Him. Give up your sorrow."

At these encouraging words, which proved as healing balm to her lacerated heart, she lifted herself up and faced Ramdas with a smile.

"O Swamiji," she cried out, "I place perfect faith in your words. I look upon you as God Himself who has come to us, in our distress, in response to our prayer."

Karta Krishna was a poor clerk in Government service whose low salary was hardly sufficient to maintain his family decently. He was paying a rental of three rupees per mensem and more than this, for a better set of rooms, he could not afford. The landlord would take no heed of his repeated appeals to carry out repairs to the roof. Doctor?—where are funds to go in for that precious help? God is the Master Doctor of the universe. He demands of us no fees, but child-like faith. We give Him this, which costs us nothing, and He delivers us from all the ills of the world.

The kind mother had prepared some choice dishes for Ramdas. He, Prasad and Ramcharandas partook of them and left the place. Next day Ramdas bade adieu to Lalitpur. The last he heard of the boy was that the fever had left him. How kind and merciful God is!

A sequel to this pathetic story has to be narrated here although chronologically its place is elsewhere.

A year passed. After wandering through many parts of India, Ramdas visited again Jhansi. Karta Krishna was there at the time when Ramdas was stopping in the Ram mandir. No sooner did the devotee hear of Ramdas' arrival than he ran down to him and insisted upon his visiting his house since his wife was so eager to see him. The latter went with him.

Ramdas met the mother at the entrance of a neat little cottage. Her small girl baby had grown up and was seen crawling on all fours quite healthy, and her boy was jumping about, strong and active. On the face of the mother was beaming the light of cheer and contentment. She welcomed him with unfeigned joy. The children got upon his lap and played and laughed with him. The house they lived in was more spacious and well protected against inclement weather. But with all this there seemed to be something amiss with Karta Krishna. The world is indeed a curious place and man's mind is more curious still. Complete satisfaction and freedom is not for him so long as his mind is subject to fits of temper.

Next day, early morning, Karta Krishna met Ramdas at the mandir. Some anxiety appeared to be weighing on his mind.

"Maharaj, I pray to you to get me transferred from here to some other place. I am tired of the present office—"

The way how he appealed to Ramdas showed that he firmly believed that Ramdas was the sole dispenser of all things in the world. Ramdas interrupted and told him in plain language:

"Look here, Ram, Ramdas is only an humble servant of God. All things happen by His will. No doubt the Master dwells in the servant but don't mistake the servant for the Master. If Lord wills, nothing is impossible. By the way, what is it that ails you?"

Karta Krishna continued: "The fact is my superior officers and co-clerks in the office are harassing me. They have all conspired to make my life utterly miserable."

Ramdas, after a short pause, spoke as follows: "Now listen, beloved Ram, bring back to memory your days in Lalitpur a year ago. What was your condition then? It was simply unbearable. God in His mercy delivered you from it. He has brought you here, provided you with a good house and is keeping your children in sound health. Now you speak of your office troubles. Nothing is wrong with the office. People dislike us because our own attitude of mind towards them is not right. Love can never beget hate. On the other hand, distrust and hate breed every kind of evil. Give up fretting. Be reconciled to the lot that God has chosen for you. Be tolerant and patient. Above all, be humble, kind and forgiving towards all in your office—nay, towards all in the world. With a mind whose passions are uncontrolled, wherever you may go, you can never know peace. You will then be only ceaselessly fighting with the world and find no haven of rest and contentment. Look within yourself. Surrender to the will of almighty God. Humble yourself before Him and extend your love and sympathy towards all beings. Take it that God does everything for the best. If you are obedient to your superiors and kind to your co-clerks, they are bound to change their attitude towards you, and then you will find the very office from which you desire to run away a delightful place for work. Kindly come to Ramdas again day after tomorrow and report to him how matters stand with you. But do act as Ramdas has told you." He left Ramdas.

The other clerks of his office who were also visiting Ramdas informed him that Karta Krishna was a very short-tempered man and would be always picking quarrels with everybody in the office. As requested, Karta Krishna turned up on the due date. He came with a bright and joyous face.

"How are you getting on?" Ramdas asked.

"I followed your advice, Maharaj," he replied, "and the result has been marvellous. There is an entire change in my office mates in regard to me. My officers have been kind and good, my colleagues helpful and friendly. Oh! how happy I am! I do not want a transfer."

"Ram," Ramdas said, "the change is in you. The whole world is good to us if we are good. If we love the world, we may be sure, in return we shall receive nothing but love from it."

Now to resume the thread of the narrative, Ramcharandas was unduly attached to the new brass kamandal and was also carrying a good many spare clothes presented by friends, besides a small amount of money. Ramdas had often advised him not to carry money and other superfluities. But his accumulative tendency was so hard to put down. Ramdas had received an invitation from Chhattarpur. He was about to start, when he told Ramcharandas to give up the kamandal and the spare clothes, and then only follow him. He obeyed most reluctantly.

They took seats in the train running to Mahoba, for the way to Chhattarpur lay via Mahoba. In the train, Ramcharandas who, as already stated, possessed some money, started purchasing eatables at every station from the sweetmeat vendors. He fell to continuous eating forgetting Ramnam. Ramdas found sitting opposite to them a sadhu with a famished look.

"How much have you got, Ram?" Ramdas asked turning to Ramcharandas.

He looked frightened at the question, for he could understand what Ramdas' question meant.

"Here it is," he said opening a knot in his cloth. The amount was three rupees and odd annas.

"Hand over the amount to the sadhu sitting in front of us," Ramdas said to Ramcharandas. He immediately obeyed. The money transferred, he was indeed free.

"Now, give some respite to your stomach and brisk work to your tongue by repeating God's Name!" Ramdas hinted. Till they reached Mahoba the Name rolled on his tongue incessantly.

(ii) Balak Ram's rage against Shiva

Arrangements were made by Bhavani Prasad, father of Ramchandra Gupta of Chhattarpur, to take Ramdas to his place. Ramdas started by motor-bus, and Vaijnath and seven others from Mahoba also accompanied him. At Chhattarpur, Ramdas and the party were lodged in the Radhakrishna temple near the city. Bhavani Prasad, an old man, welcomed him with inexpressible delight and attended to all the needs of the guests. Ramdas preferred to live on milk diet.

Bhavani Prasad, a retired Government Officer, and an earnest soul, was struggling keenly for God-realisation. His favourite reading was Bhagavad Gita which he would go through with all faith twice every day, besides the telling of beads all the day. His wife was also a great lover of saints. His elder son Gulab Rai was the secretary to the Maharaja of Chhattarpur.

On the second or third night of his stay in the mandir, Ramdas had an attack of malaria. He used to feel unusual ecstasy when he had high fever. He could not control himself. He would dance wildly taking God's Name. Bhavani Prasad and Ramcharandas would beg of him not to exert himself in that state and would almost forcibly make him lie down on the cot provided for him. The fever lasted two days.

A devotee from Navagaum, a village fourteen miles from Chhattarpur, came to take Ramdas to his place in order to introduce him to his ailing brother. Ramdas found the sick man in the last stages of consumption. He was reduced to a mere skeleton and his relations, having given up all hope of his recovery, desired to have for him the darshan of Ramdas before he passed away. Ramdas remained in Navagaum for a night, and then returned to Chhattarpur.

Balak Ram, who lived in Chhattarpur for some time, had left the place and gone into the interior, about twenty-six miles away to occupy a hill-top called Rajghad. An invitation also came from Ramchandra Gupta to go to Cawnpore. On the top of it all, a wire was received from Triveni Prasad urgently calling Ramdas again to Lalitpur, just for a day.

About noon, one day, Ramdas suddenly proposed to leave for Rajghad. The sky was dark with clouds and there was a drizzle. Ramdas walked straight out of the temple and proposed to cover the distance on foot. Ramcharandas also got ready, but what of the others? They looked askance at each other and demurred. The prospect was not alluring. The way to Rajghad lay through a dense and extensive jungle. There were no villages for halts. The other friends including Vaijnath shrank from the adventure and expressed their decision to stay behind.

Bhavani Prasad coming to know of Ramdas' determination sent his son Gulab Rai to persuade him not to start in that weather. Gulab Rai found Ramdas was fixed in his resolve and could not be moved.

"Please wait for five minutes, I will return presently," he requested and disappeared.

Within five minutes a brand new motor car was standing at the entrance of the temple. God's ways are wonderful! Ramdas got into the car, and funnily enough all the friends who had hesitated to walk with Ramdas also scrambled in—Vaijnath and all! Gulab Rai requested Ramdas to pay a visit to the owner of the car who was at that time laid up with a severe attack of typhoid fever. Ramdas agreed. The car stopped at the sick man's door and Ramdas with the party entered the house and found the patient in a state of delirium. Ramdas sat beside his bed and, passing his hands over his head and body, assured him that he would be all right. The people of the house offered Ramdas some milk to drink. He drank a part of it and gave the rest to the patient. Then he left the house and all got into the car again. It started and as it came upon the lonely road outside the city, it flew like wind in spite of the rugged condition of the jungle road.

By three o'clock the car reached the bottom of the chain of mountains called Rajghad. Alighting, the party made for the place where Balak Ram lived. They had to ascend a flight of rocky steps, over a hundred in number, before they came to a flat projection of the mountain where Balak Ram had made his abode. No sooner did Balak Ram see Ramdas than he fell at his feet, weeping through excessive joy, and embraced him again and again. Balak Ram had been living in a small shed hoisted on four strong posts, about ten feet from the ground similar to the country watch-towers in the corn-fields.

At the edge towards the hill, which extended high above the level of the place, was seen a Shiva-linga which was partly within an excavation on the hill-side. A diffused water spring at the top of the hill was dripping down its edges in tiny streams forming into a pretty thick jet which poured on the head of the linga continuously day and night. At the outer end of the flat ground was a leaning stone-bench all along the edge.

"Last night was a terrible period for me, Swamiji," Balak Ram recounted. "I was in utter despair. In spite of my herculean efforts God would not give me darshan. I flew into such a rage against Shiva that I ran wild and madly kicked at the Shiva-linga, struggled hard to uproot it from its seat and throw it down the hill, but I could not move it. It was so firmly fixed in the ground. Next I remembered you. I called you aloud, "Ramdas, Ramdas, Ramdas!"—I went on at the highest pitch of my voice for nearly half an hour and stopped through sheer exhaustion. After all, in response to my insistent call, you have come. You are my God."

"Ramdas is only a servant of God," Ramdas assured him, "who is dwelling in the hearts of us all, and he goes from place to place in obedience to His command."

(iii) God's act—Miraculous Cure

As the shadows of the evening closed upon the scene, all the friends, except Vaijnath and Ramcharandas, went down the hill to spend the night in the village at the foot of the hills. Balak Ram had a lantern which he lit when darkness set in. The mountain was clothed with a dense jungle of gigantic trees. The beasts of prey came out of their lairs and set forth their hungry roars which could be heard distinctly from all sides.

Before dark the party of four had climbed up to a higher position on the hill. The way to it was eminently slippery and dangerous. Here was a cave-like room, constructed of the bricks, in front of which was a narrow passage, and that was all the space available for their occupation.

"Swamiji, this morning I was so sure of your coming that I had smeared the inside of this cave with cow-dung so that you might occupy it," said Balak Ram, and added, "I beg, Swamiji, that you stay with me for some days."

"No, Ram, that cannot be," replied Ramdas; "you see so many friends have come with Ramdas to take him back, and the motor-car is detained specially for his return journey."

"You should not go," he persisted, "let the friends go back. I will have you alone with me. After a few days I shall arrange for a motor-car for you to go." He appealed, wept and fell at Ramdas' feet.

Then Ramdas told him that he would stay on certain conditions, and if any one of them was broken, he would go.

"I shall see that your conditions are faithfully fulfilled on my part," he promised.

"Now the conditions are: So long as Ramdas is with you, he will not leave this elevated place. Second: he will occupy the cave in the nights. Third: he will live merely on water drink. Fourth: he will observe the vow of silence. Do you agree?" Ramdas stipulated.

He gladly accepted the conditions because he believed that by Ramdas' tapasya his own uncontrolled mind would attain peace. Till late in the night the talk went on. They had rest for only two or three hours in the morning. Ramdas slept in the cave-room.

Next day all went down to the lower stage where the Shiva-linga was installed. Ramdas remained near the cave. At about eight o'clock the party from the village came up headed by Bhavani Prasad. He brought with him food consisting of purees, curry and milk to suffice all the members of the party. Balak Ram explained to them at Ramdas' request the latter's resolution to stop with him for some days and also about the conditions. So he asked them to leave the hills without Ramdas. The friends remonstrated. They said with one voice that they would not go except with him and also would not take food unless he shared it with them. He could hear their talk and see them from above. They pressed Balak Ram to bring him down. Balak Ram was in a dilemma. He had given word that he would not be a party to the breaking of the vows. The situation was extremely awkward for him. At last he had to yield. He came up and led Ramdas down. Then the party sat for dinner. Balak Ram with his own hands mixed a puree in milk with sugar and offered it to him. He ate—three vows broken—and also broke the last with the remark:

"Ram, all the vows are broken and you are the cause. So

Ramdas takes it that he is allowed to depart with the party."

"No, no Swamiji," Balak Ram cried out with frightened and grieved tone. "You may observe the vows after they are gone."

At this stage, Ramcharandas who was dead against Ramdas' stay with Balak Ram, made a sign to Ramdas not to yield to his persuasion. At this Balak Ram got terribly enraged with Ramcharandas, and with a loud voice said:

"You dare to instigate Swamiji not to stop here! May the curses of Shiva be on your head!"

Ramdas immediately replied: "The curses of Shiva be on Ramdas' head and not on Ramcharandas' since Ramdas' head is smooth, being bald, and therefore can accommodate any number of curses." Ramdas got up to start while Balak Ram wept and rolled on the ground to prevent him from going.

"Control your anger, Ram," Ramdas said, "repeat Ram-Mantram."

The party left the hills and returned to the motor-car. They reached Chhattarpur by midday. The motor-car drove directly to the door of its owner who was ill. Ramdas went in to see him. He was sitting on his bed, still weak but entirely free from fever. He shook with emotion at seeing Ramdas. He was offered some milk which he again shared with the patient and was about to leave him, when he called the motor-driver and instructed him to keep the motor-car exclusively at the disposal of Ramdas so long as he remained in Chhattarpur. He also refused to accept any fare from Bhavani Prasad for the journey to Rajghad.

Ramdas requested the friends that had hitherto followed him to return to their place, leaving him and Ramcharandas to proceed to Cawnpore. The same car took them to Harpalpur station where they caught a train for Banda for the darshan of Vishuddhanand.

CHAPTER XXIV

CAWNPORE—IN THE STEAMBOAT

(i) God cannot be proved by arguments

Ramdas spent about five days with the sadhu in Banda. He was supremely delighted to see Ramdas again. He used to make Ramdas sit on his raised asan and, squatting in front of him, read out passages from Yoga Vasishta and compare with Ramdas' state the description given therein of a liberated soul. He would exclaim with great glee: "Your life is moulded exactly after that of a jivanmukta as delineated in this work." He took Ramdas to the city and presented him to his disciples. Jagannath of Mahoba came here on a visit to see Ramdas. On the third day Ramdas had another attack of fever which lasted for one night.

One evening a man came running to the kuti and told the sadhu that there was a likelihood of bloodshed that night in Banda. Two processions, one of Muslims and the other of Hindus headed by Swami Satyadev, were to pass the same road from opposite directions. Preparations had been made on both sides for a fight. They had armed themselves with lathis. The tender heart of the sadhu was touched by the alarming news. He drew a long breath and sighed.

"Maharaj," then Ramdas spoke, "there will be no fight and no bloodshed."

He looked at Ramdas and smiled and said, "Amen." He became cheerful again. At eleven o'clock a messenger came from the town, bringing the tidings that all went well with the processions. There was no brawl between the parties. They passed on the same road, side by side, without any friction.

"God be praised," uttered the compassionate old sadhu. Taking leave of the sadhu, Ramdas and Ramcharandas started from Banda and arrived at Cawnpore where they were received by Ramchandra Gupta at the station. Gupta had arranged for their stay in a Shiva Mandir on the banks of the Ganges. Here fever again made its appearance. Gupta was a student of the local college of commerce. Hundreds of students of the college came to see Ramdas. Fever did not prevent him from having free talks with them. They would put him all kinds of questions and he was ready with replies.

One night a number of students, headed by a leader, came to interview Ramdas. They belonged to a sect called Charvak, allied to materialism. Their leader discussed till one o'clock contending that the body was all and that life was intended only for material enjoyment. Everything was merely nature and its work; there was no such thing as soul, spirit or God as controller of the worlds.

Ramdas told him at last: "Friends, Ramdas cannot prove to you by mere arguments the existence of God, nobody can. Ramdas from his own experience can boldly assert that there is God. Until you yourself get the experience, it is natural that you should deny Him. But a time will come when you too will have faith in Him."

Ramdas' stay in Cawnpore was only for four days. From Lalitpur, Triveni Prasad explained by letter that his second call was due to the local munsiff who had missed him, owing to his ignorance of Ramdas' arrival at Lalitpur at his first visit, and who was now anxious to see him. Ramdas proceeded, therefore, with Ramcharandas again to Lalitpur. The fever continued. This time they were put up at the munsiff's house. He and his wife were extremely kind. They tended him as though he were their child. Here Ramdas met Ramkinkar of Jhansi.

After a couple of days they left Lalitpur direct for Bombay. In the train they met a Sikh who was also going to Bombay. All through the journey he looked after Ramdas with great tenderness, attending to all his needs. As they neared Bombay the compartment in which they sat was vacant except for the three. Ramdas was sitting in a corner and Ramcharandas leaned out of a window. Everybody was silent in the compartment. Suddenly, Ramcharandas came bounding to Ramdas and said with surprised looks:

"Swamiji, some one has just been uttering in my ears Ramnam; I distinctly heard it. Who did it?"

"Ram, Ramdas never moved from his seat, so also the Sikh. It must be Ram, and who is there other than He?" Ramdas replied.

At the Victoria Terminus they met Sanjivarao who was awaiting their arrival. They drove in a victoria to Sanjivarao's quarters at Gamdevi.

(ii) God is Providence

The fever continued to appear every third day for about four or five hours in the evening from four to eight or nine. Sanjivarao and his wife grew anxious about him. Often in the evenings, on the fever days, he would be talking on bhakti and vairagya to the mothers who used to visit him at the time. He was reading out bits from the "Rambles in Vedanta" by B. R. Rajam Iyer. When he was narrating the life of Nanda, the pariah saint, from this book he would go into ecstasies. The life presents the unique devotion of an outcast saint who was completely merged in divine consciousness. The hearers would also become blissful.

In the night Ramdas would, in spite of fever, talk long and spontaneously, expounding the greatness of bhakti and of the inestimable power of God's Name. A doctor friend, who had great love for him, would pay him visits. He proposed to give him an injection for the fever. Ramdas would not have the treatment. But Sanjivarao and his wife were persistent. They would have him take some medicine. At their pressure he drank twice a day a bitter mixture and every time, when he did so, he remarked that the medicine was so very sweet! The mother—Sanjivarao's wife—would be surprised to hear him say so. Ramdas would only laugh. All the same the fever persisted.

"The fever refuses to leave," Ramdas observed, "because you have made him a welcome guest by feeding him with fine things. The small quantity of the bitter medicine has no effect on fever while he is well served with tasty sweets and other kinds of food three or four times a day! So long as you feed an undesirable guest he will certainly stick on. But the moment you starve him he will without your bidding make himself scarce. So allow Ramdas to go on a fast for some days. He will live merely on milk." At first the loving pair objected to the proposal, but at last yielded. A four day's fast and the fever-guest took to his heels.

Invitations came from the Sholapur District, but God willed that Ramdas should proceed to Mangalore. So he and Ramcharandas boarded the steamboat sailing for Mangalore port. Ramcharandas was busy exploring the ship for tiffin-shops. At about nine o'clock he turned up with a bright face and said:

"Swamiji, there is on the boat a coffee-hotel in which all kinds of eatables are sold. (Here his mouth involuntarily watered, and he had to drink off the nectar before he proceeded.) The hotel man says that he can also provide meals if we place an order with him beforehand—each meal costs six annas only."

Now Ramcharandas had money given him by Sanjivarao for expenses on the boat and at landing. He made a sound of coins to show that there was no dearth of funds.

"Right ho!" Ramdas replied laughing: "place at once an order for two meals for midday. Fire away."

He bounded with joy towards the tiffin-shop and personally supervised the cooking of the meals. He was himself something of an expert in cooking which art he exercised by making experiments of his dishes on Ramdas when he travelled long distances with him!

At about twelve o'clock he came to take Ramdas for meals. It was a simple but wholesome meal. After the meal Ramdas returned to his seat while Ramcharandas remained behind, talking to somebody. A little later he also came, but this time with a worried look.

"What is wrong with you?" Ramdas questioned.

"Some men near the tiffiin-shop saw us taking meals," he answered, "and remarked to me: 'Although sadhus, you are very particular about meals. Eating seems to be the predominant sadhana of your sadhu life'."

"Ram," Ramdas said with a laugh which he could scarcely repress, "the food was delicious. So also, why not find the same taste in this sweet remark?"

He never ordered further meals, presumably because the bitterness of the remark outweighed the taste of the meal!

On the way, when the steamboat was still moving, two mothers gave birth to twins. They were third-class passengers and the accouchement took place on the deck. There were among the passengers also a doctor and a nurse who attended on the mothers. In the mid-sea, even in such a contingency, God provides necessary assistance. Hence God is called Providence.

Ramdas and Ramcharandas on arrival at Mangalore were put up at Sitaramrao's house. An invitation came from Kasaragod to attend the closing day of a nama-saptah held in the house of T. Bhavanishankarrao, a relation of Ramdas' old life. He and his house-people had undertaken to repeat the Rammantram thirteen lakhs of times within a week, and in the japa children and servants had also joined.

About this time Ramdas had a visit at Mangalore from Savoor Shankarrao who held English degree and was then a professor in the Presidency College, Madras. In spite of his great learning and attainments, Ramdas found him to be a simple, humble and pious soul. He conceived a great love for Ramdas at first sight and frequently courted his company. The very talk of God would work on his emotions and bring tears into his eyes. He joined Ramdas at the nama-saptaha. Ramdas spent a most blissful time for about two or three days on this occasion. The japa had exceeded fifteen lakhs. The zeal, even of the youngsters, to make up the highest possible number of japa, as their quota, was admirable.

Ramcharandas who was also present at the religious function was asked by Ramdas to go back to Mangalore, and to have resort to solitude for japa and meditation. Accordingly he left Kasaragod for Mangalore.

A saintly soul from Kallianpur was in Kasaragod during this time owing to the illness of his grand-daughter. He took Ramdas to see the girl. The little girl had great love for Ramdas. She was overjoyed to behold him. She narrated in her own innocent way that she had a vision, on the previous night, of Rama and Sita. The girl recovered soon after this.

Ramdas also paid visits to Gurudev whose body was weak and worn out by the infirmities of old age. He was living with his son Anandrao. He was then past eighty years of age. He was perfectly calm and peaceful, and the worries of life had ceased for him. Ramdas having received an invitation from Sanjivarao of Ernakulam left Kasaragod for that place.

CHAPTER XXV

ERNAKULAM

(i) Friend of Bird and Beast

At Shoranur Ramdas met Sanjivarao who had come to escort him. For the first few days he was put up at his house. Now a remittance and a telegram came from Madhavrao Kulkarni of Anjangaum, requesting him to start immediately so as to be present at the religious celebration held annually in his house. But owing to the indifferent health of Ramdas, due to frequent attacks of malaria even after reaching Ernakulam, the friends here resolutely stood against his travelling to such a distant place as Sholapur. He had to submit, and the money having been returned, Madhavrao was duly informed by the friends through a joint letter that Ramdas' then condition of health did not permit of his travelling, and that he needed perfect rest for some time.

Ramdas proposed to Sanjivarao to provide him with a dwelling place outside the town so that people who wanted to see him might visit him there and have talks with him. Soon a house about a mile from the town was pitched upon for his stay. A day prior to his shifting to this house, a friend, a pious brahman, came to see Ramdas at Sanjivarao's abode. Ramdas was sitting on a chair facing the entrance in the front room. The time was about eight in the morning. The brahman ascended the first front step and stopped suddenly and stood stock-still like a statue, gazing at Ramdas. He possessed large eyes which looked at Ramdas with a winkless stare. A minute or two later he came inside and took a chair beside Ramdas. He was still gazing on Ramdas. For five minutes there was complete silence. Then he broke out into speech.

"Do you know," he asked, "why I stood on the steps gazing on you so intently? I shall tell you. I beheld a strange phenomenon. The moment my eyes rested on your figure I saw a brilliant flame of light all around your body. It was a pure dazzling light. I was transfixed at the sight. The light was there for a few seconds and it vanished, and then I entered the room."

Ramdas shifted to the house outside the town. It consisted of three small rooms and an open verandah. The house was situated in the middle of a garden of cocoanut palms. Ernakulam is a sandy place, being close to the Arabian sea, the shores of which are studded with beautiful cocoanut topes. The main produce of the land is cocoanut out of which oil and other foodstuffs are extracted and exported in large quantities.

In the evenings and mornings visitors used to come to his retreat to see and have talks with him. They would put him questions on religious subjects and he would, drawing upon his experiences, attempt to elucidate them. High Government officials, vakils and professors would also give him the joy of their society. The neighourhood in which he lived was of Christians whose fowls and goats that wandered around had free access to the house. He would feed them with plantains and grains which he received as presents from the visitors. The pregnant hens would lay their eggs on his bedding at day-time, believing that they would be safe there. They clearly exhibited an anxiety to preserve and protect them from their marauding masters who would deprive them of their offspring still in the egg.

But the sons of these masters came to the house in search of eggs and would carry them off. One day a poor hen missed her egg from the bedding of Ramdas on which she had laid it. Ramdas at the time was sitting outside in the verandah. He was alone. The hen directly came to him with questioning looks and cried "Ko-Ko-Ko"—meaning: "What became of my egg that I laid on your bed?"

"Mother, what can Ramdas do?" Ramdas replied. "The sons of your masters come here and take away your eggs in your absence."

The same story would repeat itself again and again. When Ramdas was one morning feeding and talking to some goats, two Christian padres came to see him. Finding Ramdas' friendly intercourse with the animals they spoke of the famous Saint Francis of Assissi whose life, they said, was similar to the one which Ramdas led.

The Lord, through the friends at Ernakulam, willed that Ramdas should write this narrative in continuation of the first book "In Quest of God." He was provided with the necessary writing materials. Ramdas commenced to put down on paper the story of his life, but gave it up after inditing a few pages. He had then, at the outset, jotted down the main points of the narrative on a scrap book, and these notes, which were preserved, are utilized now for reference.

Here Ramdas was again joined by the raja yogi who had instructed him in the practice of pranayama. Among the visitors was a prominent Malayalee vakil, Narayana Menon, who took it into his head to adopt sannyas. He also received initiation into the practice of breath-control, and the raja yogi began to deride at all other methods of concentration. Ramdas was holding up the repetition of God's Name as the easiest and best path to reach God, while the raja yogi openly condemned this method and spoke of it disparagingly to the visitors on whom Ramdas was impressing its importance. There was a clash. The visitors were perplexed and Ramdas was at his wit's end and submitted to the will of God, and God solved the problem in His own inscrutable manner. The raja yogi was residing in Ernakulam for a pretty long time even before Ramdas visited the place, and he had freely and indiscriminately instructed many people in this practice, with the result that it worked a good deal of harm among them, and there was a rush of these poor unlettered folk to this house, where, they had heard, the yogi stayed. They complained of heart palpitation, cough, loss of memory, wasting disease and what not! This storm cooled down the ardour of the yogi. He stopped urging his pet method and also giving instructions relating to pranayama.

(ii) Qualities of a Sadhu

About this time another sannyasi turned up. He entered the house, and seeing some plantains in a cupboard, helped himself to them, and then coming to Ramdas, said:

"I want a bath; get me some hot water ready, at once." Now there was no arrangement in the house for heating water. Ramdas and the yogi used to have cold baths. Ramdas made him aware of the situation.

"No excuses," he shouted, "hot water, quick. I have had no bath for several days. You see, I insist on having it here and now."

There was an earthen water-pot. The yogi quietly mounted it on three stones which he fetched from the compound, and with dry cocoanut branches lit a fire and the water was heated. Ramdas and the yogi then gave him a bath. The yogi washed his dirty clothes. The whole thing was performed by both in the best of humour. After bath he commanded:

"Where is the meal? I am hungry."

The meals for Ramdas and the yogi used to come from the city at twelve midday. The time then was ten o'clock. He was told about the time of meals. Ramdas was prepared to forego his meal for the sannyasi for that day. So he asked the friend to wait till the meals arrived.

"I cannot wait," he said. "I am going out. I will try to get food somewhere in the town." Saying this, he walked away. At twelve the meals arrived. Ramdas proposed to the yogi to wait for some time, as there was a chance of the sannyasi turning up. They waited for nearly half-an-hour but the sannyasi did not put in an appearance. The raja yogi suggested that they might finish the meals so that the carrier might not wait for the vessels very long, and added that the sadhu might have procured food in the city. So they took their food.

Just after the meal was over and the vessels were cleaned, the sannyasi entered the house with hasty and eager steps and directly went to the room where the dinner was served, and there he found nothing but a most tantalizing after-dinner smell of food, at which he sniffed.

"Where is food for me?" he bawled out.

He gave such a furious stare at Ramdas that if he could swallow up Ramdas by his gaze he would certainly have done so that instant.

"Fine fellows!—you have eaten everything and left nothing for me?" he spoke with withering scorn.

"You too shall have your meal, swami, but since you did not come in time, you will have to wait another half-an-hour," Ramdas replied. He then instructed the meal carrier to run at once to a certain friend's house and fetch double meals. The obliging young man, in half-an-hour, brought a sufficiently large quantity of food, and the hungry sannyasi had a satisfactory meal.

The sannyasi stayed for the day. That evening visitors poured in as usual but, when they saw the sannyasi there, they manifested uneasiness and anxiety. Two early visitors spoke out their mind in his presence, and said:

"This sannyasi is a great pest. He comes to our houses and worries our lives out of us. He is not satisfied with mere food. He also wants money. We poor people cannot afford to meet his demands. Further he threatens to hurl curses at us. We do not set much value on his curses, but his behaviour is quite intolerable. We would have dealt with him in a drastic manner, but we respect the colour of the cloth he wears."

While this open indictment was made to his face the sannyasi, with one leg resting in a lordly style on the other and his right hand twisting one side of his moustache, was smiling most approvingly as though he were listening to some glorious exploits of which he was the hero. Ramdas then briefly spoke to him about the true qualities of a sadhu:

"If a sadhu were to remain for a long time at any particular place, he must live outside the town and go to it only to receive his bhiksha. He must never harass the householders. He must cultivate patience and forgiveness. He must never enter their houses without the permission of the master of the house. He should not ask for money, but be satisfied only with the food that is offered to him. To wish ill of anybody or heap curses on anyone is quite contrary to the principles of a sadhu. When he wears the sannyasi robes, he should never by his conduct disgrace the cloth. The cloth stands for absolute renunciation. If he finds himself unfit for it, he must never adopt it, or, if he has taken to it through an error of judgment, he ought to give it up as soon as he discovers the mistake, lest people be deceived by his appearance.

"He must never frequent the bazaars. He must adhere to his solitary abode and do the necessary sadhanas, or enlighten those who go to him for spiritual help. If his trust in the supreme Truth and his confidence in his own desireless efforts are weak and, as a consequence, he cannot progress towards a life which is self-sufficient and independent, he would do well to abandon the sadhu's garb and life and take to any honest profession for his living, suited to his nature. To be a pest and burden to society is to court evil for himself, besides being a nuisance to those who come in contact with him."

The sannyasi listened with eagerness and concentration to Ramdas' speech, a smile playing about his lips. In the night the sannyasi was given a cloth to cover himself. Early next morning, as he got up from the mat on which he was lying, he said that he was leaving Ernakulam that day, and taking the cloth with him left the place and did not come again.

(iii) Your body is His expression

Now Ramcharandas, who was for some time roaming in some villages of South Kanara, thought of travelling towards Northern India. As he desired to see Ramdas before finally leaving the south, one day he suddenly turned up at the retreat. Ramdas was happy to see him.

In the course of conversation with him Ramdas spoke to him of the divine vision:

"God-vision is nothing but to realise and feel His presence within yourself and everywhere about you; because God is an all-pervading spirit, permeating the entire universe. The manifested worlds are not different from Him, since they are but His own expression in terms of name and form."

But the boy was not impressed at this presentation of Truth, and he said in a tone of utter dissatisfaction:

"Swamiji, I would have nothing of your nirguna or impersonal aspect of God. I want to behold Him as saguna. I crave for the darshan of the Ram-panchayatan, i.e., as Rama, Sita, Lakshman, Bharat and Hanuman. You are always harping on the same tune—His formless aspect."

Ramdas smiled and replied:

"The saguna you are after is an image of your own mind and it cannot satisfy you. You ought to rise beyond all forms of sight and mind. The true saguna or body of the Lord is the universe itself in which He is immanent and by His power He is causing, in this manifestation, birth, growth, and dissolution of all beings and things. He is also transcendent as pure spirit. Your body is one of His expressions. Your activity has its inception in the infinite power of God. Don't be deluded by a desire to behold things which are conditioned and momentary—mere phantoms of your mind. Have the true longing to realise your immortal nature and your union with the omnipotent and omnipresent God, who is the supreme Lord of the universe. Purify your mind and heart by proper discipline and entitle yourself to this glorious vision, and attain perfect freedom and eternal bliss."

Ramcharandas remained silent. A short time after this he took leave of Ramdas.

CHAPTER XXVI

ERNAKULAM—ALLEPPEY

(i) What do you make of it?

A humorous and instructive story in the life of a high official of Ernakulam may be cited here. The incident was related by the official himself who was a sincere and pious soul. He narrates:

"I am earning a sufficiently large salary for the upkeep of my family; but cupidity is one of the greatest failings to which human nature is subjected. Craving for wealth is an insatiable fire. The more you feed the fire the more furious it grows. My wife is a devout soul. She would always be praying to the Almighty to bestow on me a higher post than I now hold so that I might draw a larger salary. But her appeals remained unheeded. So one day she proposed to perform a special propitiation of the goddess of wealth in order to induce Her to yield her favour. She got a clay image of the Devi made and installed it in the room in which the family deity was worshipped. When I asked her for the reason, she said that she intended to worship the new image with a view to my being granted promotion. She added that she had warned the goddess that if she did not fulfil her wish in a month's time she would abandon her worship. A month's time and notice for the poor goddess!

"Worship went on from day to day with great assiduity and offerings of choice prasadam. I was not particular about the number of days she performed the worship. One day I found the place empty. The image was not there. I called my wife and questioned her about the disappearance of the goddess.

"'I have done with her', she replied with a look of disgust. 'I did all I could to please her but she has not granted my prayer. The month has passed away and no sign of your promotion. I have thrown her out.'

"Later, I discovered the rejected image lying piteously in a heap of rubbish in a pond, at the back of the house! Wonderful indeed is her bhakti! What do you make of it?" The listeners broke out into a loud laughter.

The raja yogi was growing cooler everyday, because more sufferers from the effects of the pranayama practice poured in. Ramdas was consulted in the matter by these people and he advised them point-blank to put a stop to the practice altogether. About the same time he received complaints on the same subject from Bangalore and South Kanara where this practice had been widely disseminated by other yogis of the same ilk. Ramdas could not remain unconcerned any longer. He was made to write a strong article, which was published in newspapers, warning the people neither to take up nor prosecute, if aleady adopted, this practice, if they were not prepared to fulfil the other conditions of the yoga, as it would otherwise cause incalculable harm to them. Ramdas also spoke about the matter to the raja yogi:

"You have observed, Ramji, what mischief this practice of yours is causing to those who cannot observe the other rules which necessarily go with the yoga discipline. So you will do well in future not to initiate indiscriminately everybody who comes to you without judging whether he or she is fit for it or not."

Now about the vakil who was preparing for sannyas. He broached the subject to Ramdas. The latter discouraged him and said:

"If you are so anxious to dedicate yourself entirely to God, you may retire from public activity and have a small kuti on your landed property and lead a life of contemplation and meditation of God. Don't think you can attain God merely by donning the orange robe."

He replied that he had once for all decided upon taking sannyas, and that he was determined about it.

"God's will be done," Ramdas submitted.

He was an elderly man of means having a family. One night he came with a set of ochre-coloured clothes and said to Ramdas:

"Swamiji, I have made all arrangements for the maintenance of my family and have made over all the rights of my property to the proper persons. I am free. Tomorrow I will leave Ernakulam. I wish to travel from place to place without funds as you did during your first year's itinerant life as chronicled in your book 'In Quest of God'."

Next day he left Ernakulam. The raja yogi accompanied the vakil—an opportunity which he could not miss of getting out of the unpleasant situation in which he found himself. Ramdas learnt that the vakil had after a few months' wanderings returned to his professional work. Now he is intimately associated with the activities of Anandashram.

Once again, the old malaria that had left Ramdas for a few months made its appearance. Ramdas began to have periodical attacks of fever.

Sanjivarao and his family were all love and kindness to Ramdas. The Ram-mantram had so firmly captured Sanjivarao that he would not forget it for a single moment. This always happens when it once takes possession of the mind. Even when you are busy with work, the mantram would be unconsciously revolving in the depths of the mind automatically. Such was the case with him at the time. He was experiencing the opening of the fountain of joy and peace within him. This was all apparent from his serene, radiant and blissful face.

News came to him that Ramdas' daughter by the old birth, Ramabai, had been betrothed to Chandrashekarrao, son of Ramdas' sister, and that the marriage was to take place in a short time in Kasaragod.

(ii) A Christian Sadhu

Mark Sanjivarao was Ramdas' cousin by the old birth. From early boyhood he and Ramdas were great chums. When he was still young, he renounced the Hindu faith and embraced Christianity. The great Christ, as a supreme ideal, fascinated and captured him, and as an earnest seeker of the everlasting life, i.e., the kingdom of God, he became Christ's disciple. The friendship between him and Ramdas continued unhampered. Ramdas admired his courage in taking a step which threw him into odium and made him an object of ridicule from the Hindu public. He bore the cross of persecution calmly because he had the courage of his convictions. He associated with pure and saintly souls amongst the Christian missionaries and imbibed from them the spirit of a dedicated life.

Ramdas' new birth and purified vision had brought about a momentous change in his life. On his return after a year's absence from South Kanara, Mark Sanjivarao paid a visit to him, and Ramdas felt great joy on seeing him. Now his love for Ramdas had increased a hundredfold. He was instrumental in bringing Ramdas in close touch with the sublime teachings of Christ in the New Testament. Ramdas had no predilection for any particular creed or religion. He held in the highest veneration the founders of all the great religions of the world—Sri Krishna, Jesus Christ, Buddha and Muhammad. Now

Ramdas knows that these great ones are the torch-bearers of Truth who show to the deluded souls the path to the supreme Reality, a Reality which is revealed as these torch-bearers.

Mark Sanjivarao was a preacher of the Christ's Gospel and his sphere of work covered an extensive field. He came to Ernakulam on his way to Alleppey and Kottayam in the Travancore State. He paid a visit to Ramdas in his retreat and proposed to take him to these places. Ramdas at once fell in with the idea. They started and reached Alleppey in due time. Here they were put up in a commodious building called the Christian Institute. In the Institute, Ramdas came in touch with two self-sacrificing Christians, sadhu Mathai, an elderly man, dressed in ochre-coloured robes, and Thomas, a young man. Both of them showed great love for Ramdas. Thomas was quiet in his ways whereas Mathai was not; he set about hammering into Ramdas Christ's teachings as the only true revelation of God. He worked at the proselytism in season and out of season with all the ardour of a Christian missionary. Ramdas told him finally:

"God has given Ramdas' head a permanent shape. You may hammer on as much as you like but you cannot change its shape into what you wish it to be!"

Mark Sanjivarao, who was watching, burst into roars of laughter. He would ask Ramdas humorously:

"Has Mathai been able to change the shape of your head?"

"Mathai cannot perform the impossible. Ramdas' head is cast in such a mould that a permanent shape has already been given to it," Ramdas would reply. And they would laugh. Whenever Mathai approached, Ramdas would remark: "The hammer has come." At last Mathai gave up his futile task and Ramdas concluded that the hammer had broken!

Those were jolly days that Ramdas spent in the Institute. In the spacious upstair rooms of the building, Ramdas freely frisked, danced, jumped, and ran about like a playful kid. Sanjivarao remembered Ramdas' oft-repeated expression, 'wild joy'.

Sanjivarao delivered in the Institute two sermons on "Why I became the disciple of Christ." After a few days' stay, Ramdas with Mark Sanjivarao and Thomas proceeded to Kottayam. On the day he reached the place, he had an attack of malaria. He was accommodated in the house of a pious Christian who was all hospitality and kindness. The fever continued only for one night.

The following day a lecture by Sanjivarao was announced to the public. The local Y.M.C.A. building was the appointed place for its delivery. A resident missionary was in the chair. There was a crowded audience. Next morning. Ramdas, of course in the company of Sanjivarao, visited the Christian High School. The Principal, clad in khadi, offered Ramdas a glad welcome and arranged for a speech to the students by Ramdas. The latter spoke in English on "God is Love" as revealed in the teachings of Jesus Christ for half-an-hour. The Principal interpreted the same in Malayalam to the assembled students.

In the evening there was another lecture by Sanjivarao at the Y.M. C. A. At the pressure of the friends, Ramdas spoke for about fifteen minutes before the regular speaker took the platform. Ramdas dealt with the unity of religions and pointed out that in their teachings all the great incarnations of the world of different ages perfectly agreed. Next followed the speech of Sanjivarao. This time there was no president. The president was God Almighty who was seated in the hearts of the speakers and the audience themselves.

After a couple of days they returned to Ernakulam. Now Ramdas got the idea of visiting the ensuing Kumbhamela of Hardwar. The prospect of seeing the Himalayas again made him quite enthusiastic. But before proceeding towards the north, he left Ernakulam with the intention of paying a visit to Kanara.

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GLOSSARY

Akhada	.. Abode of Sadhus
Annakshetra	.. Free feeding house
Asan	.. A seat or yogic posture
Ashram	.. Abode of a saint.
Ashtanga yoga	.. A spiritual practice governed by eight rules
Atman	.. The Spirit or Self
Avatar	.. Incarnation
Badmash	.. Rogue
Barfi	.. An Indian sweetmeat
Bhagawan	.. The Lord; Personal God
Bhajan	.. Worship of God with singing
Bhiksha	.. Alms
Bidi	.. Country leaf cigarette
Brahman	.. Impersonal God
Cadjan pole	.. Cocoanut branch bereft of leaves
Charas	.. An extract of ganja
Chawl	.. Block of buildings
Chela	.. Disciple
Chesta	.. Pranks
Dal	.. Preparation of pulse
Dandawat	.. Prostration
Darshan	.. Visit or Vision
Devi	.. Goddess
Dharmashala	.. Rest house
Dhed	.. Pariah
Dhun	.. Chorus

Dhyan	.. Meditation
Diksha	.. Vow
Gerrua	.. Red ochre
Goshala	.. Cowshed
Haridas	.. A religious preacher
Japa	.. Repetition of God's name
Japa Mala	.. Rosary
Jilabi	.. An Indian sweetmeat
Jiva	.. Individual soul
Jivanmukta	.. A liberated soul
Jnana	.. Divine knowledge
Kamandal	.. Water vessel carried by Sadhus
Kambal	.. Blanket
Kandamool	.. Edible jungle roots
Kaupin	.. Loin cloth
Khaddar — Khadi	.. Handspun and handwoven cloth
Khichdi	.. Hotch-potch
Kirtan	.. Devotional music
Kripa	.. Grace
Kula Devi	.. Family Goddess
Ladoos	.. Sweetmeat balls
Langoti	.. Loin cloth
Lila	.. Play
Linga	.. Phallic symbol
Lota	.. A small handy water vessel
Mahant	.. Head of a religious institution
Mahatma	.. A great soul
Maidan	.. A vast plain
Mandapam	.. Decorated structure
Mandir	.. Temple

Math	.. Hindu monastery
Maya	.. Illusion
Maya-ghotala	.. Maze of illusion
Mela	.. Assemblage
Mridang	.. Indian drum
Murti	.. Image
Nagar Bhajan	.. A procession of devotees singing hymns
Namaz	.. Muslim prayer
Nam–sankirtan	.. Singing God's Names
Nam-saptaha	.. A seven days' celebration during which God's names are sung continuously
Parabhakti	.. Higher Bhakti or Bhakti that comes after Jnana
Parikrama	.. Circumambulation or the path of
Patashala	.. School
Patel	.. Village headman
Pativrata	.. A true and chaste wife
Pranayama	.. Breath control
Pujari	.. Worshipper
Puranic	.. Expounder of scriptures
Puri or puree	.. Fried wheat bread
Rajoguna	.. The quality of passionate nature
Ram-mantram	.. An incantation containing the word Ram
Ram-smaran	.. Remembrance of God
Rangoli	.. Artistic designs on the floor formed of a white powder
Rasuyee	.. Kitchen
Riddi Siddhi	.. Material needs

Roti	Home-made bread
Rudraksha	A large-sized bead dear to the devotees of Shiva
Sadhaka	A male spiritual aspirant
Sadhu	Saint
Sakama	Tinged with worldly desires
Samadhi	A saint's tomb or trance condition
Sannyasi	A religious mendicant
Sannyasini	A female religious mendicant
Satwic	Mild or non-irritant
Shanbhogue	Village accountant
Shamiana	A kind of canopy
Sharan	Surrender
Shraddha	Faith
Tapas	Austerity
Tapaswi	An ascetic
Tapobhumi	A place sanctified by austerities
Vairagya	Dispassion
Vina — Veena	A stringed instrument of music
Viswarupa Darshan	Universal vision
Yajnakunda	Sacrificial altar
Yogadanda	Arm-rest used in yoga practice

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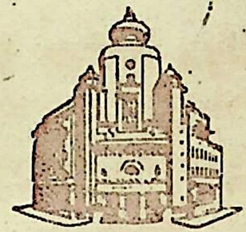

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THE AUTHOR

After receiving initiation of the *Ram Mantra* from his father, Swami Ramdas, who was then known as Vittal Rao, renounced the worldly life in 1922 and wandered as a mendicant Sadhu all over India and in the Himalayas, in a frenzy of God-intoxication, with the holy and all-powerful Ram Mantra ever on his tongue, and with God as his only refuge and guide. His was the completest surrender to the Will of God.

Many years of wandering life brought him finally back to South Kanara. Having attained spiritual liberation and God-vision, he started his mission to guide and serve mankind in order to awaken it to the awareness of God. He founded an Ashram named Anandashram near Kanhangad, N. Kerala, which is fostered by love and care by Mother Krishnabai. his foremost disciple and a Self-realized soul. Swami Ramdas' writings come from the deeps of Reality and therefore go straight to the heart. In 1954, he and Mother Krishnabai went on a world tour and hundreds of his devotees, friends, and admirers who had loved and venerated them from a distance, had a chance to come into close contact with them. Since the last three decades Anandashram has been a powerful spiritual beacon, and thousands have been constantly visiting it, carrying home with them the torch of Light, Love and Service lit at the feet of the great Master.